AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW *with* SUFJAN STEVENS

paste

SIGNS *of* LIFE IN MUSIC, FILM & CUL

NOVEMBER 2009

PASTEMAGAZINE.COM $5.95 U.S./CANADA ISSUE 58

BEST *of the* DECADE

THE TOP ALBUMS, MOVIES, BOOKS *and* GAMES *of the* LAST 10 YEARS

PLUS ➳ ANNE LAMOTT *on* JONATHAN SAFRAN FOER ➳ EUGENE MIRMAN *on* SURVIVING 2010 ➳ MICHAEL AZERRAD *on* PUNK'S LEGACY ➳ A REVIEW OF THE WORLD'S OLDEST RECORDED MUSIC ➳ *and a* NEW NOVEL *by* VLADIMIR NABOKOV

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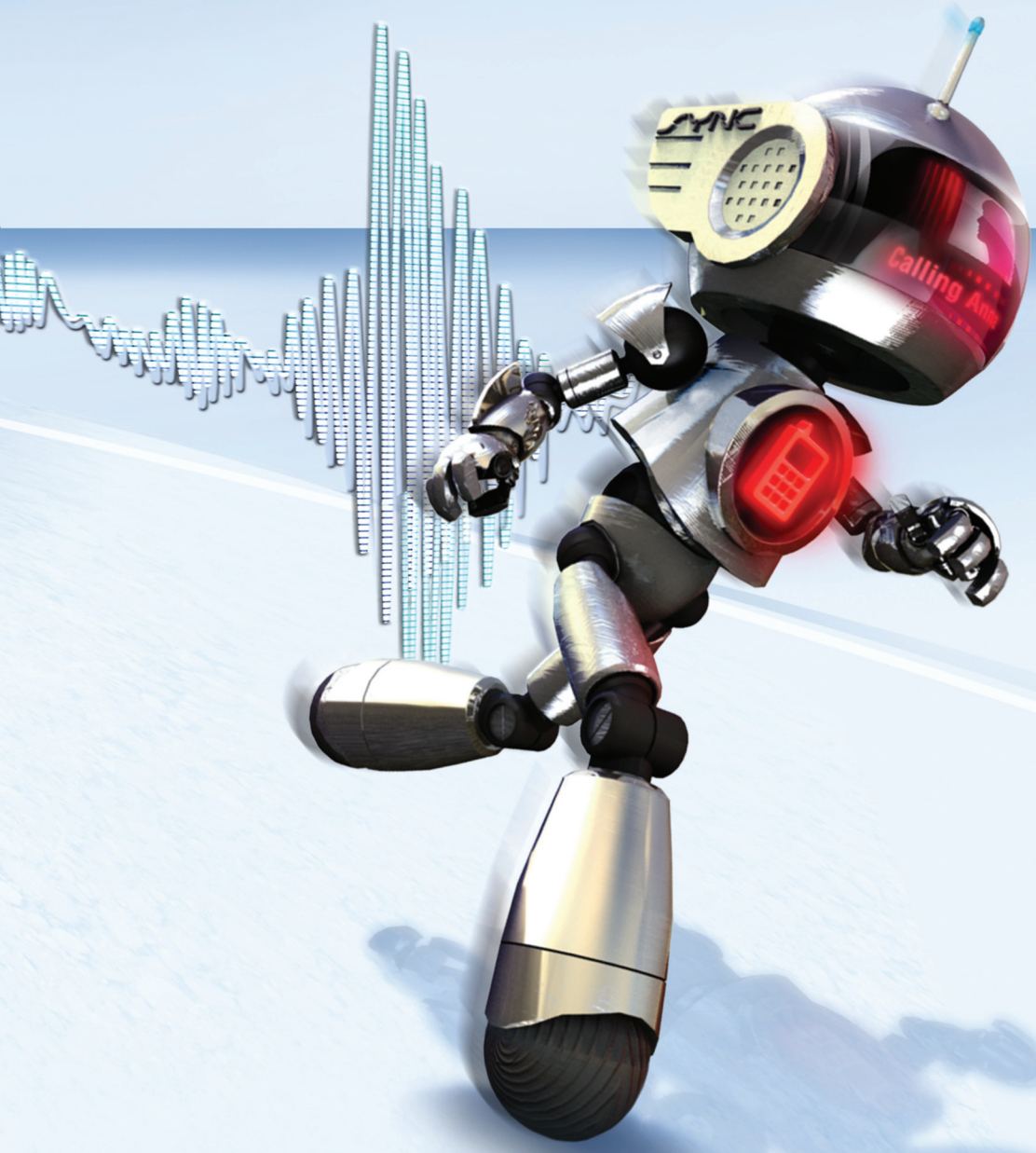

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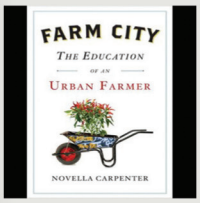
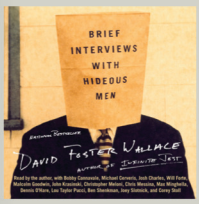


Farm City

Novella Carpenter
Narrated by
Karen White

Author Novella Carpenter and her boyfriend chose their Oakland, Calif. apartment based on the large, vacant lot next door. Having tackled gardening, raising chickens and keeping bees, Carpenter wanted to take on a bigger challenge—creating an urban farm. Her memoir *Farm City*, read by Karen White, chronicles the couple's development of that vacant lot—including their acquisition of livestock—as well as the vibrant characters that populate their new neighborhood. White narrates with a matter-of-fact sensibility dotted with dry humor and a healthy sense of irony, reflecting her excitement at every triumph and frustration with setbacks. When Carpenter rationalizes her decision to raise livestock for meal and describes the daunting task of buterching the animals herself, White is especially unflinching, conveying a conflicted, candid confidence. Her frank tone suggests it's not the idea of having one's own farm that should seem strange, but rather that so few of us have a personal connection to the food we eat every day. - *Erin Ikeler*



Brief Interviews with Hideous Men

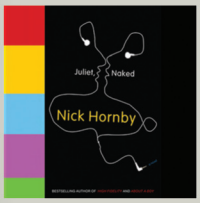
David Foster Wallace
Narrated by
John Krasinski

David Foster Wallace's short story collection *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men* is meant to be heard. Many of the 23 pieces are imagined interviews, after all—tales of lonely, violent, desperate, intelligent, articulate men, penned by an author who could have easily counted himself among them. Wallace himself narrates about a third of the stories with an unmistakable softness and intimacy that only he could bestow on his undesirable characters: When they shout, rant, and say awful, murderous, or demeaning things, his gentle inflections coach you to respectfully witness their monstrosities. Actor John Krasinski—who recently adapted the collection into a film—narrates another third, his voice a bit edgier but no less compassionate. The other stories are read by actors from the ensemble cast of Krasinski's film adaptation, but there's a beautiful simplicity in the narration that makes the text vivid in a way movies can't—these are men explicating the very roots of their psyches, so deep and dark you may not want to look them in the face. - *Megan Volpert*

New York Trilogy

Paul Auster
Narrated by
Joe Barrett

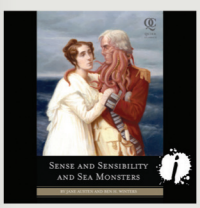
Paul Auster's debut novella collection features a set of everyman characters in highly philosophical predicaments, and Joe Barrett voices their frustrated decision-making with a deep empathy that declines to mock the very absurd dilemmas in which the characters embed themselves. Barrett's is a well-oiled baritone (practiced in several of Audible's Auster offerings), reading these tales of psychological misgivings like an introspective Casey Kasem, laying down the obsessions of one character after another. All three stories feature a man who is both a writer and a detective, highlighting what happens to a mind left to work on a project in solitude for too long, with an emphasis on the quandaries of language and the roles of coincidence. With no less than four characters named Peter Stillman, two named Daniel Quinn, and even one pretending to be Paul Auster, the author offers up postmodernism at its best while never losing sight of the sad and lonely threads that tie his three stories together. In a bonus interview, Auster discusses thematic commonalities in his work and his use of New York as a backdrop. - *Megan Volpert*



Juliet, Naked

Nick Hornsby
Narrated by
Bill Irwin

Duncan is the kind of guy who won't man-up for his girl, Annie. He won't take charge of his own life. And he won't face the fact that Tucker Crowe, the semi-legendary and wholly reclusive singer/songwriter to whom Duncan has devoted most of his life, is nothing more than a mere mortal, just like him, with the same desires and needs and fears. Of course, this is a Nick Hornby book we're talking about—and no self-disrespecting Hornby protagonist would be caught dead facing the facts of the matter. Luckily for Duncan, both Annie and Tucker have a stronger grasp on life, even as they too spiral in place. Echoing his work in *High Fidelity* and *About a Boy*, Hornby has created a work of fiction so full of hope, truth, trust and need that it feels just like real life. - *John Hood*



Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters

Jane Austen &
Ben H. Winters
Narrated by
Katherine Kellgren

After the surprising success of this year's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (a mash-up of Jane Austen's original text with doses of dead bodies and blood), publishing company Quirk Books hungrily sought out its next literary victim: *Sense and Sensibility*. Hence, *Sense and Sensibility and Sea Monsters*, the next book in the monsterfied classics series. Although the co-author differs from P&P&Z (Seth Grahame-Smith signed on to write *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter* with another publisher, so Ben H. Winters is now taking it on), there should still be a thrilling mix of Austen's timeless language with splashes of all-out horror. Even more so, actually: While the Zombies book was about 80 percent Austen's writing, Winters said his monster-to-Austen ratio is more like 60/40. - *Angela Pham*

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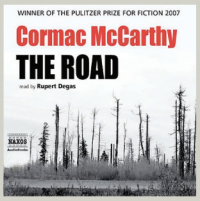
SELECTIONS FROM PASTE'S BEST BOOKS OF THE DECADE

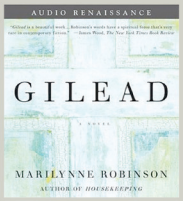
The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay

Michael Chabon
Narrated by
David Colacci



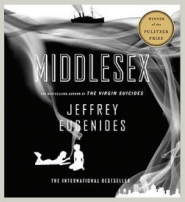
The Road

Cormac McCarthy
Narrated by
Tom Stechschulte



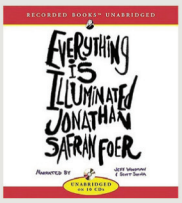
Gilead

Marilynne Robinson
Narrated by
Tim Jerome



Middlesex

Jeffrey Eugenides
Narrated by
Kristoffer Tabori

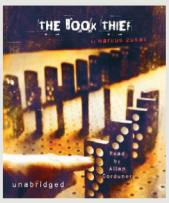


Everything Is Illuminated

Jonathan Safran Foer
Narrated by
Scott Shina and
Jeff Woodman

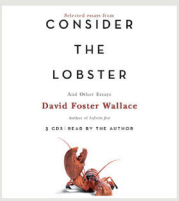
The Year of Magical Thinking

Joan Didion
Narrated by
Barbara Caruso



The Book Thief

Markus Zusak
Narrated by
Allan Corduner



Consider the Lobster And Other Essays

David Foster Wallace
Narrated by
David Foster Wallace

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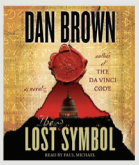

1. *The Lost Symbol*
Dan Brown
Narrated by Paul Michael

2. **Outliers: The Story of Success**
Malcolm Gladwell
Narrated by Malcolm Gladwell

3. **The Associate**
Malcolm Gladwell
Narrated by Malcolm Gladwell

4. **The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo**
Stieg Larson
Narrated by Simon Vance

5. **The Help**
Kathryn Stockett
Narrated by Cassandra Campbell, Jenna Lamia, Octavia Spencer Bahni Turpin

6. **First Family**
David Baldacci
Narrated by Ron McLarty

7. **The Scarecrow**
Michael Connelly
Narrated by Peter Giles

8. **The Girl Who Played with Fire**
Stieg Larson
Narrated by Simon Vance

9. **Angels and Demons**
Dan Brown
Narrated by Richard Poe

10. **New Moon**
Stephanie Meyer
Narrated by Ivana Kadushin

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Paste has always prided itself on helping readers connect with the most substantive, thought-provoking and life-enriching art out there. Here's the best of what we've discovered in the aughts.

36 SUFJAN STEVENS: ON THE ROAD TO FIND OUT

In 2005, Sufjan Stevens released *Illinois*—the second album in his now-sidelined 50 States Project. Since then, he's essentially gone underground, leaving fans clamoring for a follow-up. While he hasn't been in the headlines, the reclusive Stevens *has* been consumed by his most ambitious project yet. *Paste* finds out exactly what he's been building in there. ***By Kate Kiefer, Photography by Denny Renshaw***

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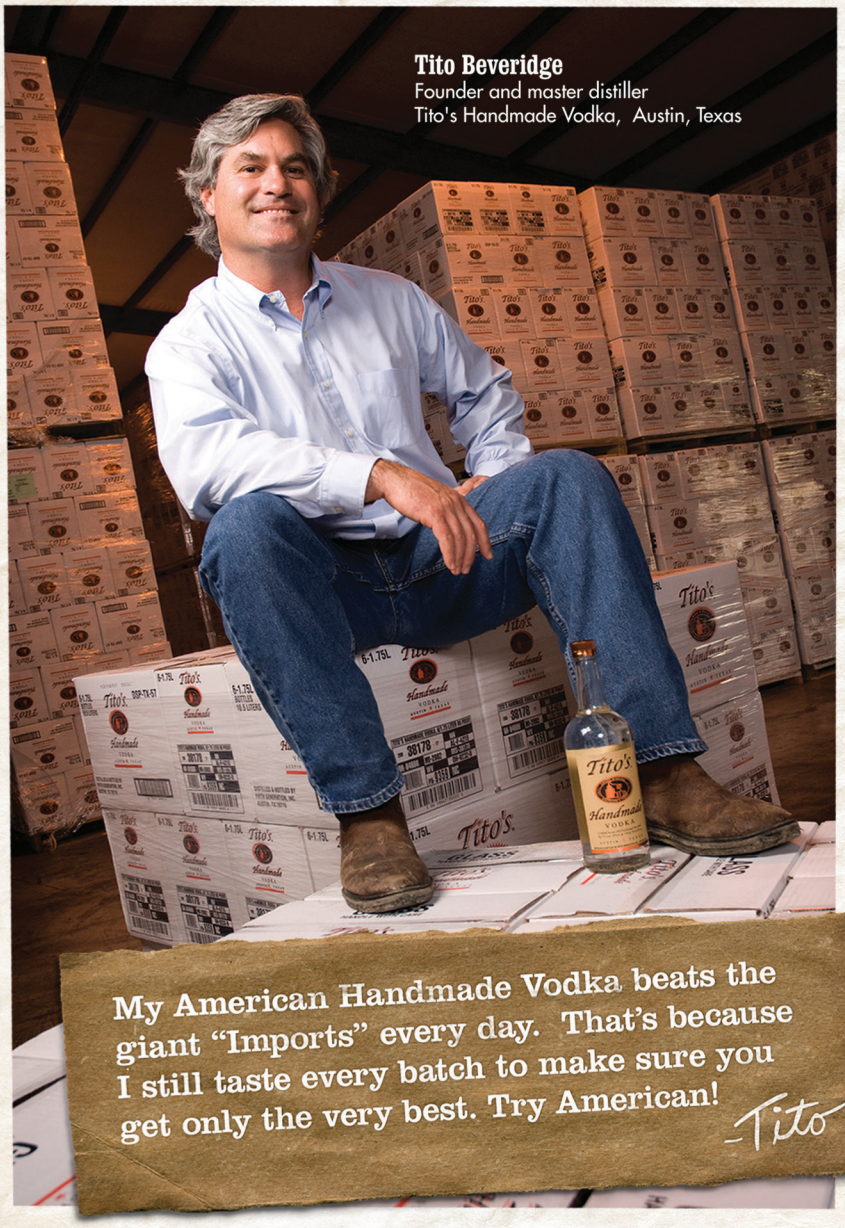
AMERICAN *Passion* IS ALIVE AND WELL


Tito Beveridge
Founder and master distiller
Tito's Handmade Vodka, Austin, Texas
My American Handmade Vodka beats the giant "Imports" every day. That's because I still taste every batch to make sure you get only the very best. Try American!
-Tito

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EDITORIAL

BY JOSH JACKSON

SIMPLY THE BEST

When this decade began, *Paste*'s website was barely a year old, and the magazine was still a twinkle in its daddies' eyes. So looking back over the 2000s feels like revisiting our own history. Every new album, film, TV show, video game or book *Paste* has covered was eligible for our "Best of the Decade" consideration. Dozens of critics voted in these five categories, and then we argued some more until we'd focused our spotlight on the very best pop culture created during the aughties—whether it was wildly popular or is still waiting to be discovered by the masses.

Looking at each of these lists confirms my belief that—despite the seismic economic shifts that the entertainment industry has faced—the democratization of once-expensive-to-create art forms like movies and albums has resulted in unprecedented innovation, variety and accomplishment. With an ever-increasing roster of television channels, networks like AMC and SyFy are taking chances on thoughtful, complex series that would have never aired in the 20th century. Technological jumps in the video-game world have wrought gorgeous graphics, but it's really the attention to story that has transformed the gaming experience from a fun way to kill time to an immersive artistic experience. And just when we thought the book form had been stretched to its limits, authors like Dave Eggers and the late David Foster Wallace gave us something entirely new.

More than trying to create a canon for the '00s (that'd be *so* last millennium), we're hoping you'll use this issue to reflect on some of the artists who shaped your decade, and discover others who will change how you look at the next. After reading the loving descriptions in these pages, I've already got films I missed the first time around—like *Syndromes and a Century* and *Beau Travail*—in my Netflix queue. And I look forward to reading *Gilead* and playing *Portal*.

But this trip down memory lane wouldn't be complete without revisiting my favorite album of this decade, Sufjan Stevens' *Illinois*. In a rare interview, the enigmatic songwriter talked to *Paste* associate editor Kate Kiefer about his masterpiece and why a follow-up state album has never materialized. He's illustrated on the cover by Divya Srinivasan, who also illustrated *Illinois*' album cover.

Our Best-of-the-Decade celebration continues online, where we reveal numbers 26-50 of the best albums and films and 11-20 of the best TV shows, video games and books. We're also narrowing our focus with a new List of the Day each day in November ranking the decade's best album covers, documentaries, music videos and much more. What a great time to be a fan of thoughtful, engaging and original entertainment. And what a great time to be covering it all.

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INBOX

THE CURSE OF COVERAGE

I very much enjoyed Andy Whitman's spot-on article about Jim Carroll ("Jim Carroll and the Punk Pulitzer," *Paste* #56) and his classic album *Catholic Boy*, which ranks as one of my all-time favorites. Just curious if Mr. Whitman had any inkling that his column might turn into a eulogy. Wow. Hope this doesn't turn into another *Sports Illustrated* cover curse, as musicians will run screaming every time A.W. shows his face. **AL MYERS.** } Fort Mill, S.C. }

THE REAL MONSTERS OF FOLK

While the moniker "Monsters of Folk" may be funny ("Don't Fake the Folk," *Paste* #56), it's certainly not original. In April 1998, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Dave Alvin, Tom Russell and Chris Smither released a fine collection of acoustic folk, country and blues under that very name on Hightone Records. It was followed by a short tour, which I was fortunate enough to catch at The Bottom Line in NYC. While James, Ward and company are fine musicians in their own right and among the better musicians out there today, the originals include one bona-fide legend and three near ones who haven't gotten the recognition they deserve. Just wanted to give these devils their due. **DAN ROHAN** } Bronx, N.Y. }

BEATLES REMASTERED

I was excited to see the cover blurb promoting the reviews of The Beatles remasters (issue #56), thinking *Paste* would take a fresh, different look at this seminal music. Instead, the reviews contained absolutely no insight at all into the remastered discs, and even worse, writer Mark Kemp resorts to the ultimate hipster cliché—that John was the rocking genius and Paul was the schmaltzy pop boy. How lazy of Kemp and *Paste* to miss the point of what made The Beatles *The Beatles*. John and Paul were both wildly creative and innovative, they both had an unparalleled sense for melody, and their collective and individual abilities to tap into a wide range of influences was the essence of the group.
DAVID YAUN } Ridgefield, Conn. }

Paste
the Call of the Wild
Jim James, M. Ward, Conor Oberst & Mike Mogis are Monsters of Folk
Fear & Self-Loathing with Patton Oswalt
Helter Skelter: We Review Every Beatles Album
Things
by Charles McNair

So *Paste* rates *Sgt. Pepper* an 89, really? Mark Kemp claims it's an overrated album, and the new-music section of issue #56 indirectly claims Brandi Carlile's new album is better than *Pepper* with a score of 90—and David Bazan's *Curse Your Branches* and The Arctic Monkeys' *Humbug* also rival The Beatles' classic album at 89. Is it that easy to forget innovation, studio engineering/mixing/production, cover art/inserts, melody and the impact on popular culture (and other artists) by one album?
MATT WEST } Fort Collins, Colo. }

I admire Mr. Kemp for his attempt at reviewing the entire Beatles catalog. There is no body of work as storied and influential in modern pop music, and reviewing every album in four pages must have been a nightmare assignment for even the most seasoned music journalist. The only significant gripe I have with the piece is Mr. Kemp's attribution of The Beatles' expanding sonic palette during the *Revolver* and *Sgt. Pepper's* period almost exclusively to George Martin. Commenting on the "studio wizardry" displayed on *Sgt. Pepper's*, the reviewer claims that "Martin deserves most of the credit for creating its dense layers." While Mr. Kemp deserves credit for peeking beneath the surface and for not attributing all of The Beatles' sonic innovation to the four lads on the album covers, any self respecting

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Beatles fan knows that much of the credit belongs to Geoff Emerick, the main recording engineer for these and several subsequent Fab Four recordings. While Martin certainly had a hand in the process, many of the sonic ideas on *Revolver* and *Sgt. Pepper's* stemmed from The Beatles themselves and were realized through Emerick's innovative and unconventional recording techniques. Martin's classical background, while informing his gorgeous string arrangements and disciplined leadership in the studio, frequently put him at odds with The Beatles, who became more and more determined to eschew traditional recording practices as their career progressed and turned to the young and willing Emerick for a fresh perspective. Minor technical qualms notwithstanding, Mark Kemp is a braver man than most and we can only applaud his efforts. Thank you, *Paste*, for proving that music journalism can be stimulating without relying on cynicism!

BRIAN HOWELL { Nashville }

A SPARSER SPEKTOR

I completely agree with your assessment of Regina Spektor's trajectory, I am afraid to say (*Paste* #54). I had such high hopes for Spektor when I first saw her at a small, standing-room-only pool hall in Toronto back in April 2005. She was shaky and nervous, a bit timid. She pounded through a frighteningly up-tempo version of "Samson"; it was raw, wounded and amazing. The formula was simple—Regina, piano, microphone and drumsticks for an occasional rhythm. I was sure this brilliant performance was indicative of much greatness to come. I truly think her downfall was ever signing with a record company—adding a band and mainstream-radio pop production into her delicate mixture soured the whole thing for me. She was and still is masterful on the piano, and needs no accompaniment or editing. Even her album *Begin To Hope* had these issues—a dismantling of the original character she possessed in both her early, self-released albums and in her early performances. She should take a cue from Nellie McKay (another adorable, feisty, sometimes-rapping piano songstress from this decade) and get out of this contract. Maybe that will remove the stain overproduction has left on her powerful, sometimes painful lyrics and sound. I want the girl back—alone on the piano with a tape recorder.

JOAN STOLITMAN { Detroit }

GREETINGS FROM GHANA

When I left my home to serve overseas as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Ghana, I knew that besides family, friends and food, I would miss music and concerts—or as your magazine so eloquently puts it, "Signs of Life in Music, Film & Culture" with every fiber of my being. Even with a fully crammed iPod, I began craving new music almost immediately upon arrival. I am not exaggerating when I say that my subscription to *Paste* has saved my life and preserved my sanity in this third world country. I may not be as up to date or knowledgeable about new artists as I was in America but through your magazine I still feel connected to something that I tried so hard not to leave behind (or be left out of). Thank you for doing such a wonderful job at keeping the world of music within my reach as I reach out to explore the rest of the world. **LISA NICOLAISON** { Ghana, West Africa }

ERRATA *The review of David Byrne's* Bicycle Diaries *in our September issue was miscredited. The correct reviewer is Nick A. Zaino III.*

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ONLINE

Reviews of new movies *That Evening Sun*, *Up in the Air* and *Precious: Based on the Novel Push By Sapphire*, plus new albums from Tegan and Sara (above), John Mayer and Carrie Underwood.

Live from *Paste* performances by (from top) The Baseball Project, Rosi Golan, Keegan DeWitt and fun.

Add your own user rating to anything reviewed in this issue!

ONLINE Throughout the magazine, this symbol denotes additional content online. Visit **PasteMagazine.com/November09.**

Tegan & Sara photo by Pamela Littky

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PASTE SAMPLER

ISSUE 58

1 FUN.

"All The Pretty Girls" (fun.) from *Aim And Ignite.* ℗2009 Nettwerk Productions. Courtesy of Nettwerk Music. **Hometown:** New York **Website:** ournameisfun.com **(PG. 23)**

2 A PLACE TO BURY STRANGERS

"In Your Heart" (A Place to Bury Strangers) from *Exploding Head.* ℗2009 A-Side Music. Courtesy of Mute Records. **Hometown:** Brooklyn, N.Y. **Website:** aplacetoburystrangers.com **(PG. 22)**

3 MONSTERS OF FOLK

"Dear God (Sincerely M.O.F.)" (Monsters of Folk) from *Monsters of Folk.* ℗2009 AND / Yamo-Obwa, LLC. Courtesy of Shangri-La Music LLC. **Hometowns:** Omaha, Neb.; Louisville, Ky.; Portland, Ore. **Website:** monstersoffolk.com

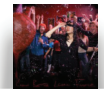
4 ERIN MCKEOWN

"Santa Cruz" (E. McKeown) from *Hundreds of Lions.* ℗2009 mimscyle music (ASCAP). Courtesy of Righteous Babe Records. **Hometown:** Fredericksburg, Va. **Website:** erinmckeown.com **(PG. 60)**

5 SWITCHFOOT

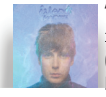
"Hello Hurricane" (J. Foreman / T. Foreman) from *Hello Hurricane.* ℗2009 Publishing Schmublishing Publishing (ASCAP). Courtesy of Atlantic Recording Corporation. **Hometown:** San Diego **Website:** switchfoot.com **(PG. 63)**

6 THAO WITH THE GET DOWN STAY DOWN



"Know Better Learn Faster" (T. Nguyen) from *Know Better Learn Faster.* ℗2009 Thanks For Playing (ASCAP). Courtesy of Kill Rock Stars. **Hometowns:** San Francisco; Richmond, Va. **Website:** thaomusic.com **(PG. 64)**

7 ISLANDS



"Vapours" (N. Thorburn) from *Vapours.* ℗2009 Swann (BMI/SOCAN). Courtesy of ANTI-. **Hometown:** Montreal **Website:** anti.com **(PG. 64)**

8 THE SWELL SEASON

"Low Rising" (G. Hansard) from *Strict Joy.* ℗2009 Warner Chappell Music. Courtesy of ANTI-. **Hometown:** Dublin, Ireland **Website:** anti.com **(PGS. 18, 58)**

9 CAPGUN COUP

"Ari Are We" (Capgun Coup) from *Maudlin.* ℗2009 Team Love Records. Courtesy of Team Love Records. **Hometown:** Omaha, Neb. **Website:** myspace.com/capguncoup **(PG. 25)**

10 MILES BENJAMIN ANTHONY ROBINSON

"The Sound" (M.B.A. Robinson) from *Summer of Fear.* ℗2009 Saddle Creek. Courtesy of Saddle Creek. **Hometown:** Brooklyn, N.Y. **Website:** saddle-creek.com **(PG. 59)**

11 LUCERO

"Sounds Of The City" (B. Nichols) from *1372 Overton Park.* ℗2009 Empty Road Music (ASCAP). Courtesy of Universal Republic Records and Empty Road Music. **Hometown:** Memphis, Tenn. **Website:** luceromusic.com **(PG. 63)**

12 THE RAVEONETTES

"Last Dance" (S.R. Wagner / T. Troelsen) from *In and Out of Control.* Courtesy of Vice Music. **Hometowns:** New York, Los Angeles **Website:** theraveonettes.com

13 DINOSAUR JR.

"The Backyard" (M. Mulcahy / R. Neal) from *Ciao My Shining Star: The Songs of Mark Mulcahy.* ℗2009 Mezzotint / Paymarx Music (BMI). Courtesy of Shout! Factory, LLC. **Hometown:** Amherst, Mass. **Website:** markmulcahy.com **(PG. 60)**

14 IMAAD WASIF

"Widow Wing" (I. Wasif) from *The Voidist* ℗2009 Tee Pee Records. **Hometown:** Los Angeles **Website:** imaadwasif.com

15 SUSAN ENAN

"Bird" (S. Enan) from *Plainsong.* ℗2009 Feast Music Group. **Hometown:** New York **Website:** susanenan.com **(PG. 60)**

16 THOMAS FUNCTION

"Belly Of The Beast" (J. Macero / Thomas Function) ℗2009 Fat Possum Records. **Hometown:** Huntsville, Ala. **Website:** myspace.com/thomasfunction

17 RICHARD THOMPSON

"She Sang The Angels To Rest" (R. Thompson) from *Walking On A Wire: 1968 - 2009.* ℗2009 Beeswing Music (BMI). Courtesy of Shout! Factory LLC. **Hometown:** London **Website:** richardthompsonmusic.com

18 HEAVY TRASH

"Gee I Really Love You" (J. Spencer / M. Verta-Ray) from *Midnight Soul Serenade* ℗2008 Patricia Ann Music / Marsupial Parlay Vous Music (BMI). Courtesy of Big Legal Mess Records. **Hometown:** New York **Website:** myspace.com/heavytrash **(PG. 64)**

19 BROOKE WAGGONER

"Go Easy Little Doves, I'll Be Fine" (B. Waggoner) from *Go Easy Little Doves.* ℗2009 Brooke Waggoner Music (BMI) / Swoon Moon Music. **Hometown:** Nashville **Website:** brookewaggoner.com **(PG. 64)**

20 KATIE COSTELLO

"Inside Out" (Katie Costello) from *Kaleidoscope Machine,* ℗2009 Song Doodlers Anonymous (ASCAP). **Hometown:** Hermosa Beach, Calif. **Website:** katiecostellomusic.com

21 EUGENE MIRMAN

"Vancouver, Detroit, and Bears!" (E. Mirman) from *God is a Twelve-Year-Old Boy with Aspergers.* ℗2009 Sub Pop Records. **Hometown:** Brooklyn, N.Y. **Website:** subpop.com/artists/eugene_mirman **(PG. 15)**

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SAMPLER BONUS TRACKS (DOWNLOAD ONLY):

22 **OSSO/Sufjan Stevens** - "Year of Our Lord" from *Run Rabbit Run* (pg. 36)

23 **Vic Chesnutt** - "Philip Guston" from *At the Cut*

THROUGHOUT THE MAGAZINE, THIS SYMBOL INDICATES AN ARTIST APPEARING ON THIS MONTH'S SAMPLER.

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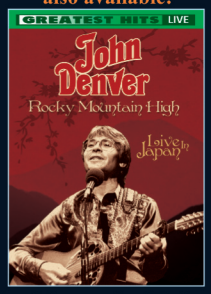

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THE MOUNTAIN GOATS, THE SWELL SEASON, **PAINT MY ALBUM,** NORAH JONES, **PIRATE RADIO,** VLADIMIR NABOKOV **AND MORE**

HOW TO SURVIVE THE NEXT YEAR

BY EUGENE MIRMAN

In 1996 we all thought that by 2010 the world would be an unrecognizable dystopia, filled with robotic policemen, pornography you inject directly into your penis, and wireless telephones that worked while hiking. We were so naive back then, running Netscape, looking up Smashing Pumpkins lyrics on AltaVista and WebCrawler. The future is largely not what we predicted (even those of you who shoehorned Nostradamus prophecies to retro-predict 9/11 after the fact). If you think Captain America was surprised at the 1960s once he was thawed from that iceberg, imagine how much more unnerving he would find the modern-day world (booty texts? Whaaaaaaaat?!)—and also how shocked he'd be to find out the Human Torch isn't real. To help deal with 2010, I've assembled a little survival guide with tips to aid you in the coming year:

1 Wear nice shoes and be sure to have a fanny pack full of airplane-size whiskey bottles in case there's an impromptu signing of a business deal.

2 Don't make any wild claims about a new band until you hear its second album.

3 If you encounter an extraterrestrial, tell someone. Don't just hide the alien in your garage. John Kerry would be a good person to talk to. Aerosmith would also be good—you can relax, no one's dissecting an alien that's friends with Aerosmith.

4 A new social networking giant will rise from its sleep—feel free to join, but don't over-promote whatever it is you do. Thanks!

➥ COMEDIAN EUGENE MIRMAN'S NEW ALBUM, *GOD IS A TWELVE-YEAR-OLD BOY WITH ASPERGER'S,* IS OUT NOW ON SUB POP.

Photo by Brian Tamborello

EARS WE TRUST

Nellie McKay

The Old Harp Singers of Eastern Tennessee
"Wondrous Love"
Time stands still—you feel the blood, sweat and trauma of history. Gristly yet transcendent.

Anita O'Day
Anita O'Day Sings the Winners
An emotional rollercoaster disguised as devil-may-care.

Maria Callas
"Casta Diva"
For walking alone amongst the skyscrapers.

The Velvet Underground & Nico
"Femme Fatale"
Brings nostalgia for living in the moment.

P!nk
"Please Don't Leave Me"
Her song becomes a mantra, her video is phat, and she's vegan!

NELLIE MCKAY'S NEW ALBUM, *NORMAL AS BLUEBERRY PIE: A TRIBUTE TO DORIS DAY,* IS REVIEWED ON PG. 66.

CONFESS WITH THY MOUTH

MOUNTAIN GOATS FRONTMAN GRAPPLES WITH FAITH

John Darnielle is almost certain there is no God, but he can't quite count himself as a nonbeliever. "Isn't it better to either be an atheist or a fundamentalist? Agnosticism's the least glamorous theological position," he laughs. "Anyone who says they never doubt is lying. But anyone who's perfectly happy with there being no force of total love and forgiveness in the universe is also pretty foolish."

Bookish singer/songwriter and cult icon, Darnielle has wrestled with spirituality for the nearly two decades he's recorded as The Mountain Goats. The decision to base each track of his lush and melancholy new album, *The Life of the World to Come,* on Bible verses isn't just an expression of his predilection for textual criticism. His chronic, tour-ending health problems (specifics of which haven't been publicly disclosed) and the death of his mother-in-law provided ample grist for contemplation. "It's the sort of stuff that makes you look very hard at what you feel about God and religion."

For Darnielle, the God-less practice of religion is indispensable. He maintains a lifelong cultural connection to Catholicism, and prays the Rosary. But he forgoes dogmatic adherence to any set of rituals, focusing instead on the transcendent power of all things devotional. "I love going to Hare Krishna temples to chant," he says. "I don't really believe in it, but I believe in praying." He pauses and exhales softly before continuing. "I believe in the spirit of prayer, and the process, and finding some way of acknowledging my own smallness in the infinite. So I still behave religiously, faith or no faith. I think it's a good thing, and I enjoy it. But I think you need to engage beyond technical exercises."

He shifts to a rapid staccato as he reconciles his humanism and religion: "My feminism is what came squarely up against my faith. It's the biggest problem you face if you believe in both religion and the absolute equality of men and women." And yet there's no personal inconsistency for him in the new album's sixth track, based on the 30th chapter and third verse of the "unapologetically patriarchal" book of Genesis, where Bilhah acts as a surrogate mother for Rachel. Darnielle calls it the most beautiful love story he's ever read. "To me, it's not about the subjugation of women, it's about people who love each other expressing that love 'off the grid.'"

The record's closing track draws its title and narrative from the seventh chapter of Ezekiel, an Old Testament vision of the end of the world. Amidst that fire and brimstone, Darnielle finds redemption in the hard-won Biblical lessons. "There are plenty of people in the Bible who do things for which they shouldn't be forgiven unless they beg, and they don't," he says. "Yet grace, divine or otherwise, absolves the most monstrous sins. If there is grace." **MICHAEL SABA**

Mountain Goats photo (Darnielle, center) by Chrissy Piper

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GO YOUR OWN WAY: NORAH JONES AND THE SWELL SEASON RECOVER FROM BROKEN HEARTS

Is *The Fall* a breakup record? "I think in a lot of ways it is, and in a lot of ways it isn't," says Norah Jones of the follow-up to 2007's *Not Too Late*. Her split that year with longtime boyfriend Lee Alexander made the gossip pages, despite her silence on the subject. She has no intention of sharing her thoughts on the matter today, either, though she's generous with the fries accompanying her hefty veggie burger at the East Village restaurant where we've met. "Will you have some?" she asks. "I won't eat them all."

I ask her about "Back to Manhattan," a song that feels like the moment you know a relationship is really over. There's a line where she says she's returning to the city, where she has "a prince who is waiting." Given that the last song on *The Fall* is about finding true love with a dog, I assume the prince is also a canine.

"Oh, that's cool," she says. "I mean, it's not like"—she feigns petulance—*"'I'm not gonna tell you what that song is about.'"* Still, she doesn't tell me. I learn she celebrated her and a dear friend's 30th birthdays this past March with a bowling party, and that she got a poodle the color of "peanut butter," but even though we talk and laugh 'til the fries have gone cold, she remains elusive.

"I'm not going to talk about my breakup. I'm not going to go into details about my mom and dad. It's tough for me to open up when it involves other people," she explains. "There's enough in the songs that you can piece together." She smiles. "And you won't know what's about us and what isn't."

You might think the prince is a dog, I say. "You might think the prince is a dog," she says. "And you might be right." **KRISTINA FELICIANO**

Glen Hansard and Markéta Irglová of The Swell Season starred in the low-budget Irish film *Once*, fell in love, won an Oscar for their song "Falling Slowly," and then fell out of love.

Everyone assumed that the end of their romance meant the end of their musical partnership. Instead, they remained friends and went to Connecticut together to record some songs. Irglová even cooked a traditional Czech dinner for the band every night. "Even though we've stopped being, you know, boyfriend and girlfriend," Hansard says, "we're still super connected. I feel like, certainly, by her side I can walk through any storm."

Their new record, *Strict Joy*, has moments of strict sorrow—like Irglová's "I Have Loved You Wrong," a name that says it all. "I won't lie to say that it's not sometimes difficult to hear someone say, 'Forgive me lover, I have sinned, I have let you go,'" Hansard says. "You know? It's like, *fuck*." But for every tragic verse, there's a glimmer of hope. Northern-soul song "Low Rising" marks an especially tender place in the pair's romance-turned-friendship: "I want to sit you down and talk / I want to pull back the veils / and find out what it is I've done wrong," Hansard sings.

"I was trying to say, 'Come on, we can do it!" he explains. "Come on, I want to figure this out. I want to make it better. I want us to be good friends."

The new record is named after an Irish poem by James Stephens called "Strict Care, Strict Joy":

Caring for grief he cared his grief away:
And those sad songs, tho' woe be all the theme,
Do not make us grieve who read them now-
Because the poet makes grief beautiful.

"He's alone. He's missing his woman. He writes poetry," Hansard says of the poem's main character. "But when he reads back the poetry, he finds that he's not feeling any of the darkness of the poetry, he's only feeling joy." **KATE KIEFER**

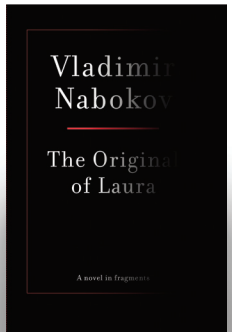
Norah Jones photo by Autumn Dewilde. Glenn Hansard photo by Conor Masterson

THE MASTER'S SPUTUM
UNFINISHED NABOKOV NOVEL NOW OPEN TO EXAMINATION

In 1962, prodded by an interviewer to share a glimpse of a first draft, novelist Vladimir Nabokov replied, "Only ambitious non-entities and hearty mediocrities exhibit their rough drafts. It is like passing around samples of one's sputum." Now, more than 30 years after his death, we have an opportunity—against Nabokov's expressed wishes—to examine such a sample.

As he lay dying in 1977, the author of *Lolita*, *Pale Fire* and 17 other novels of unsurpassed artistry instructed his wife to destroy his unfinished work on a prospective novel, tentatively titled *The Original of Laura*, a story of an author transforming his love affair into fiction. Véra Nabokov could not bring herself to obey her husband, and asked their son, Dmitri—an opera singer and the elder Nabokov's sometime translator—to carry out the task. Dmitri dallied for three decades. Finally, he has decided to publish.

That decision is beyond the scope of any outsider to judge as healthy or greedy, vengeful or generous, careless or noble. Dmitri's public act results from a private relationship between a man and his father. Artistically, however, one can grumble. Nabokov believed—alongside one of his characters in *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*—that an author should leave behind only finished work. "I used to be a little conjuror when I was a boy," the author said, and he rated most highly those authors who were "enchanters." He believed the best art was like magic, and everyone knows how to ruin a magic trick.



Now the curtain drops and we are allowed backstage, allowed to read Nabokov's unfinished work (billed by its publisher as "a novel in fragments"), which he famously wrote on index cards in pencil, a primitive word-processing system. Readers can detach perforated reproductions and re-order them to create their own version, a jolly game of Nabokov shuffle. But just as a "vase in fragments" is not a vase, *The Original of Laura* is not a novel.

A few chapters cohere and then fade; a flash of plot is discernible as through a rainstorm. Nabokovian characters are still early in the process of distinguishing themselves from previous, more individual versions (Margot in *Laughter in the Dark*, Pnin). Sentences are scratched out, reworked. There are outlines, notes, scraps. One index card is just a list of synonyms.

Reading *Laura* brings a literary hero down a little to the workaday world. We see him trying to organize his thoughts, weigh his options, do some research, feel out his wordings and narrators. Single lines sit alone on cards, similar-sounding words tested for their affinity or conjuring power: "ITS TEMPTING EMPTINESS" is one example, a phrase that's symbolic of the entire project. **ARTHUR PHILLIPS**

Vladimir Nabakov photo by Jerry Bauer

the PASTE MAGAZINE 6 OUR FAVORITE FORGOTTEN BITS OF THE 2000s

1. **Kate Kiefer, Associate Editor → The Cosmopolitan** The first time I got drunk, I had two-and-a-half cosmos then puked in the back of a cab—I was just trying to be glamorous like Carrie Bradshaw. Sadly, the trend lasted about as long as my hangover, so I never got a do-over.

2.

Josh Jackson, Editor in Chief → Gubernatorial candidate Gary Coleman Who remembers that the former child actor and mall security guard ran for Governor of California in 2003 and got more than 14,000 votes—good enough for 8th place! I miss how crazy that sounded back then.

3. **Tim Regan-Porter, President → SpaceshipOne** The first private manned space flight held out some hope of progress from the hand of commerce, but who even remembers that now? Maybe Chris Anderson can figure out some mega cross-subsidies that will let Google and Ryanair offer free off-world vacations in the 2010s.

4. **Rachael Maddux, Assistant Editor → Napster** Like the Blues Traveler and Macy Gray MP3s it brought into our lives, the pre-eminent illegal file-sharing program is long gone, replaced by a legit version—but its memory still lives, and the sense of entitlement it instilled in the modern music fan shall never die.

5. **Austin L. Ray, Web Editor → Friendster** We all make bad choices, like my joining Friendster earlier in the decade. It is the best *worst* social networking site—an online version of *Troll 2*. I miss it (sometimes).

6. **Steve LaBate, Associate Editor → Boom Goes The Dynamite** This classic viral video of freshman campus-TV broadcaster Brian Collins failing grandly, painfully, hilariously at delivering sports highlights—thanks to a tele-prompter mishap—is among the greatest guilty pleasures of the aughties.

7. **Nick Marino, Managing Editor → Privacy** As the Decade of Over-Sharing winds down, we commemorate those halcyon days before Facebook, Twitter, blogging and reality television. A time when our "friends" were our friends, and the only people with "followers" were cult leaders.

Nautical Rock:
FILM TAKES POP TO THE HIGH SEAS

Pirate Radio, the latest movie by *Love, Actually* director Richard Curtis (review pg. 71), isn't just set to music—it's suffused with it. On a ship off the British coast in the 1960s, a pack of rowdy men (and one woman) blare triumphant rock and pop to an English audience strangled by the government's soporific blandness. On the boat, in cramped quarters in the middle of the sea, the DJs live out some very rock 'n' roll fantasies, with everything from The Kinks to Otis Redding always in the foreground. Curtis spoke to *Paste* about some of his favorite songs in the movie. "I wanted the film to be ecstatic," he says. "I wanted to pull in everything at all moments." **MARK KROTOV**

"Wouldn't It Be Nice"
THE BEACH BOYS "'Wouldn't It Be Nice' happens in the movie when everything is really awful—we were so tempted to put in a big dramatic song. What's so wonderful about pop music when you have something awful or ghastly in your life [is that] a song can cheer you up."

"So Long, Marianne"
LEONARD COHEN The song plays during an improvised scene in which two shipmates console a luckless lover. "That's my favorite scene in the movie because I didn't write it—it's like a gift to me," Curtis says. "I might even say that Leonard Cohen is the funniest man I've ever seen in concert, which is odd, because his music is so miserable. He's just full of really good jokes."

"Won't Get Fooled Again"
THE WHO Why an anachronistic song? "I couldn't resist the temptation. I thought, 'Oh, well, we'll get one letter from a bloke from *Paste* magazine.' I just couldn't really resist it. It's amazing how modern The Who sounds—how big and aggressive those guitars sound. We wanted something meatier and dynamically different from the rest of the film."

MUST WE PAINT YOU A PICTURE?
CHEEKY WEBSITE RE-IMAGINES CLASSIC ALBUM COVERS

In 2007, Manchester wisecracker Anthony Richardson reproduced the cover of Michael Jackson's *Bad* using the primitive art software Microsoft Paint. He gave MJ pink skin, airbrushed hair, raccoon eyes and a pitiful two-tone leather jacket. "I'll be honest," Richardson says. "I couldn't be more proud of anything I've ever done." Since that initial cover, Richardson and his buddy Diarmuid White have launched PaintMyAlbum.net, a Paint-based website that now hosts hilarious YouTube sketches and more than 2,000 album covers from artists around the world. "Some of them are amazing," Richardson says. "Some of them are terrible. Some of them are dreadful. A lot of people have no talent, I'll tell you that." **NICK MARINO**

HERE ARE OUR FAVORITES, COMPLETE WITH ANALYSIS FROM RICHARDSON AND WHITE.

1

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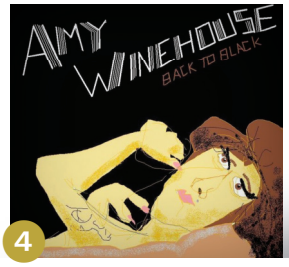

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❶ **MICHAEL JACKSON'S *BAD* BY ANTHONY RICHARDSON, MANCHESTER, U.K. | WHITE:** This is our first album cover redone in MS Paint, and Anthony Richardson has set the tone beautifully by giving the late King of Pop two types of hair: an underlying jagged edge, and a softer spray canned top. Where are the eyebrows? Anthony forgot to draw them.

❷ **THE BEATLES' *LET IT BE* BY ROBIN N, ST. LOUIS | RICHARDSON:** Robin N was our first American contributor, and she specializes in very large eyes. My favorite part is John Lennon's spectacles. Why are they broken? The answer is simple. He is being domestically abused by Yoko Ono.

❸ **LIL WAYNE'S *THA CARTER III* BY JEREMY JANOWIAK, OKLAHOMA | WHITE:** Several key facial features are missing, such as nose and eyelashes, which indicates that Janowiak was pushed for time. But while he misses detail in some areas, his attention to others is painstaking. Regard the hand in all its complicated beauty: Arabic lettering, a single frog spawn and the word "DAC" combine to produce a piece of flesh unrivalled in art.

❹ **AMY WINEHOUSE'S *BACK TO BLACK* BY CLAY MCCUISTION, CONCORD, N.H. | RICHARDSON:** At Paint My Album, I always said that I wouldn't rest until we had a picture of an elderly Amy Winehouse with a clawed hand reclining naked on a French baguette.

❺ **LIONEL RICHIE'S *LIONEL RICHIE* BY RICHARD MAJER, NEWCASTLE, U.K. | RICHARDSON:** This is a middle-aged, bewildered Lionel Richie who has lost control of his bodily functions. He has wee on the side of his jumper. Richard Majer has thrown us a curveball here: That isn't Lionel's hair, but a dead mink.

❻ **THE ROLLING STONES' *BETWEEN THE BUTTONS* BY OLIVER POLLARD, NOTTINGHAM, U.K. | WHITE:** Oliver Pollard is Paint My Album's very own Georges-Pierre Seurat with this lesson in MS Paint Pointillism. There is a certain morbid streak as well, as Pollard has imagined each member of the Rolling Stones as a living corpse. Where is the focus? It is on Charlie Watts' tie.

Images courtesy of Paint My Album

PRETTY IN PUNK

BY MICHAEL AZERRAD ILLUSTRATION BY JACOB THOMAS

I never thought I'd quote former Doobie Brother and MCI pitchman Michael McDonald, but he recently said something interesting to *Paste* about recording with Grizzly Bear: "The punk movement swung towards being as primitive as possible, but now it's back to where these guys are good musicians. I never thought that would come back around, but it has." Of course, punk was about tearing down what people like McDonald had built, and putting up something better. It's just that punk's legacy has finally gotten to the point where Mr. Yah Mo Be There himself gets it.

I was 16 in 1977, when my friend Andy came back from a summer in London with a box full of singles by bands who played the "punk rock" I'd only heard about. It was raw, furious—a refreshing slap in the face to the vapid, edgeless corporate rock that hemmed us in on all sides in the U.S. It wasn't all loud and fast, though; Elvis Costello recalled Van Morrison and had smart lyrics and lots of chords. New York punks like Television and Talking Heads made visionary music that wasn't fuzzed out or pissed off. Punk didn't have rules—that was the point. Because I had the immense and infallible wisdom of a teenager, I could see where it was going: The music was inevitably going to get more and more sophisticated. But this time it wasn't going to sound like Styx or the Doobies. This time, it wasn't going to suck.

From U.K. post-punk to the great '90s alt-rock explosion to lo-fi, post-rock and beyond, there was great stuff to be found—even the disappointing post-9/11 retreat into recycled '80s music produced Interpol's zeitgeisty first album. Then cheap digital recording technology and the explosion of file sharing released a glut of fascinating music to anyone willing to do a little sleuthing.

So now, more than 30 years since punk erupted, I'm part of an entire generation of people who grew up right along with underground rock. But we don't always need noisy, angsty music anymore—our lives are frazzled enough, thank you, and anyway, we've been there, done that.

Enter a whole new school of indie musicians who make pretty, melodic sounds, sometimes lushly orchestrated or adorned with rich vocal harmonies. The musicianship is accomplished but never flashy. There's Sufjan Stevens' incandescent musicality, Joanna Newsom's encrypted heartbreak, Andrew Bird's literate whimsy, the crafty passion and guitar heroics of St. Vincent, Department of Eagles' exquisite neo-Nilsson pop, plus Fleet Foxes, Rogue Wave, Grizzly Bear, Dirty Projectors and many of the bands on the flagship *Dark Was the Night* compilation.

In a long, strange trip kind of way, McDonald is right: This music *is* descended from punk, and not just because it's uncompromised and made by and for a specific community. This movement owes a huge debt to the infrastructure punk rock built, but just as significantly, the musicians take punk's DIY spirit and "no rules" attitude and instead of making three-chord Warped Tour rock, produce imaginative, idiosyncratic music that makes you think. It doesn't need to be fast and fuzzy to signify punk values anymore—today it could be a woman playing harp and singing about the distinction between meteors and meteorites.

Back in the booming Clinton '90s, we could afford loud, anguished music. Today, times are tough and grunge's cataclysmic angst would seem redundant. But this new music isn't just a balm for the soul. The regressive precincts of our society stoke a culture of crass ignorance, and this music is a progressive response: Unabashedly intelligent, well-wrought, beautiful and sincere, it's a metaphor for a productive way of approaching the world. (And, frankly, it sounds really good on an iPod.)

Now, I hate it when rock critics try to be outrageous and proclaim that "rock is dead." But recall that Western classical music began as a dance genre and eventually became highfalutin' art music you couldn't dance to anymore. The widely held historical take is that's when the music began to die. Same thing with jazz. Although this decade has seen plenty of danceable indie rock, it feels less like a leading edge than a dying gasp. On the other hand, this new undanceable music feels like the forefront of something, even if it end really does herald rock's terminal stage. There will surely be another primitivist backlash, but it's going to sound a lot like orthodox punk rock. And that's when the inbred musical tail-chasing will really begin.

↪ MICHAEL AZERRAD IS THE AUTHOR OF *OUR BAND COULD BE YOUR LIFE: SCENES FROM THE AMERICAN UNDERGROUND 1981-1991* AND IS CURRENTLY EDITING THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF BOB MOULD.

GRAVE-ROBBING & SHOCK-ROCKING

A PLACE TO BURY STRANGERS JOINS THE CANON OF CLASSIC BONEYARD BANDS

WORDS BY STEVE LABATE | ILLUSTRATION BY RAY FRENDEN

...AND YOU WILL KNOW US BY THE TRAIL OF DEAD
1994 -
"In vacant lots and flourescent malls, in one-room coffins and crowded halls, I walk in the shadows of your tortured realm."
THE MISFITS
1977 - 1983
Sweet lovely death, I am waiting for your breath, come sweet death, one last caress.
WHITE ZOMBIE
1985 - 1998
I am the crawling dead, a phantom in a box, shadow in your head.
ROCKET FROM THE TOMBS
1974-1975
AIN'T IT FUN WHEN YOU KNOW THAT YOU'RE GONNA DIE YOUNG
GRAVEDIGGAZ
1994-2002
"I be entombed, I don't squawk like a hawk or stalk like a stork, but walk in New York, stay away from the pork."

The October release of *Exploding Head*, A Place To Bury Strangers' Mute Records debut, is fitting—the band could've scored the *Halloween* movies with its raunchy, explosive throwback sound. Through the layers of pulsing bass, static electronic drum blasts and gauzy synths, it's almost impossible to hear what lead singer Oliver Ackerman is droning on about, but whatever it is, it's gotta be dire and dour in equal measure.

With *Exploding Head*, the Brooklyn trio takes its rightful place alongside these haunting forbearers in the canon of creepiness.

A PLACE TO BURY STRANGERS
HOMETOWN: Brooklyn, N.Y.
ALBUM: *Exploding Head*
MEMBERS: Oliver Ackermann (guitar, vocals), JSpace (drums), Jono MOFO (bass)
FOR FANS OF: The Raveonettes, Nine Inch Nails, My Bloody Valentine

Illustration by Ray Frenden

START SPREADING THE NEWS FUN. IS HERE

Photo by Elizabeth Weinberg

Last year, following the dissolution of his first band, ex-Format frontman Nate Ruess made a pilgrimage idealized by young Americans long before Sinatra's famed salute: Having overstayed his welcome in his Arizona hometown, the songwriter moved to New York to start a new life. "There's a big difference between comfort and what you're destined to do," Ruess says. "I needed a change in every aspect of my life."

Now teamed with Steel Train lead singer Jack Antonoff and former Anathallo multi-instrumentalist Andrew Dost, Ruess has documented this change on his new band's debut *Aim and Ignite*, on which frenetic lyrics and mille-feuille instrumentation capture the anxiety and thrill of being in a new city where everything is ripe for discovery. The new group is called fun.—an oddly-punctuated but perfectly apt band name if there ever was one. In rowdy bar anthems and reminiscing ballads, the record narrates Ruess' coming to Brooklyn, coming of age and coming to terms with what he's left behind.

The trio took in a lot of Broadway theater while writing the record, and its sung dialogue, bellowing horns and bombastic choruses are begging to be choreographed—a notion that might not be completely out of the question. "We're doing this group work-out together," Ruess says. "We bought an infomercial DVD called *Insanity*, and we've gotten pretty synchronized. Maybe we can learn some dance numbers next."

CATHERINE PREWITT

FUN.
HOMETOWN: New York
ALBUM: *Aim and Ignite*
MEMBERS (L-R): Andrew Dost (keyboards, guitar, vocals), Nate Ruess (vocals), Jack Antonoff (guitar, vocals)
FOR FANS OF: Ben Folds, Queen, The Format

BLOGGER

CARLES IN CHARGE

HIPSTER RUNOFF WRITER RULES THE INDIE BLOGOSPHERE

Like lonelygirl15 before him, the anonymous indie-music blogger "Carles" is one of the Internet's great unreliable narrators. He loves "scare quotes," is fixated on "authenticity," and peppers his two-year-old Hipster Runoff blog with posts about Animal Collective and Grizzly Bear to the point of self-parody. His brilliant and incendiary website satirizes alternaculture from the inside out; Carles is the Andy Kaufman of indie rock, and the only people who could possibly get his jokes are the very hipsters he implicates.

"I feel like we are all sharing a collective experience, so HRO is a place for people to reflect," Carles tells *Paste* in an instant-messenger interview, drifting in and out of character. "There are moments when we all feel proud, insecure, meaningful or insignificant. I am just trying to relate to the common alt."

To wit, when *Merriweather Post Pavilion* leaked late last year, Carles penned a reality-check post titled "Animal Collective is a Band Created By/For/On the Internet," puncturing the hype with a devastating picture of a pitchfork (get it?) with the caption, "This is a metaphor about mob mentality."

"When it comes to confronting alternative topics and showcasing indie bands, I feel like I 'take my voice to the extreme' to make a point, but it also might be my honest opinion," Carles says. "I feel like HRO is a 'breath of fresh air' in the music blogosphere. I feel differentiated, but in order to properly monetize, I think you have to 'sell out' and start writing terrible blurbs about indie-band news." Hipster Runoff draws about 400,000 visitors a month and is indeed monetized, running American Apparel ads and selling "I Am Carles" T-shirts—which, for $3,000, Carles will personally deliver. It's even spawned a satellite radio show. The playlist? Indie rock, of course.

HIPSTER RUNOFF.COM
FOR FANS OF:
Stereogum, Brooklyn Vegan, meta-commentary

The site "theoretically" makes enough money to be a full-time gig, though Carles (a recent college grad) has kept his entry-level day job. "I waste 80 percent of my day on the Internet. I am very unproductive at my job, and I have been called into Human Resources for seeming like I 'don't care.' It seems like I am 'hitting the wall' and possibly need to move into a new industry." **NICK MARINO**

ACTRESS

CARRIE PRESTON

BLOOD, SWEAT & TWANG

Hollywood is littered with young starlets who come out of nowhere, land a big role and suddenly get their images splayed across gossip pages and men's magazines. But Carrie Preston's ascent has been slow and steady. The 42-year-old has made the most of every role—first bit parts in films like *Transamerica* and *The Stepford Wives*, then guest spots on TV shows like *Arrested Development* and *Sex and the City* and, more recently, as Arlene Fowler on HBO's vampire drama *True Blood*.

In her latest film, *That Evening Sun*, she steals scene after scene as Ludie Choat, a long-suffering farmwife trying to survive on the former homestead of an aging Tennessee farmer (Hal Holbrook) who's having trouble letting go. The film adapts one of Southern author William Gay's short stories, and gives Georgia native Preston a chance to return to her roots.

CARRIE PRESTON
HOMETOWN: Macon, Ga.
FILM/SHOW: *That Evening Sun, True Blood*
FOR FANS OF: Amy Adams, William Gay, vampires

"When I became a classically trained actor, I lost the accent," she says. "And then my first major Hollywood movie was *My Best Friend's Wedding* where I was playing a Southerner. So you can take the girl out of Georgia, but you can't take the Georgia out of the girl. I'm glad because I like being able to call it up when I need it. I think it's nice to have the luxury to distinguish between different types of accents, different types of class, you know, different characters, whereas a lot of actors in Hollywood just sort of put on this Tennessee Williams thing."

Preston has called forth her own opportunities, too, creating acting jobs when they weren't falling in her lap. In 2004, she launched a production company with a classmate from Juilliard, James Vasquez, and his partner Mark Holmes. Preston directed Daisy 3 Pictures' first feature, *29th and Gay*, and starred in 2007's *Ready? OK!* alongside her real-life husband Michael Emerson (Ben Linus on *Lost*).

"If you're not being hired, then every little brick that you lay, you know, 'I built something here,'" she says. "I feel like since *True Blood* came on the air, a lot of things just all came to a head at the same time. It's been a really good year for me." **JOSH JACKSON**

Hipster Runoff photo courtesy of Carles. Carrie Preston photo by Jsquared Photography.

FRANK TURNER
THE NEW STRUMMER

For someone who often gets slapped with the "folk" modifier, Frank Turner's musical ambitions began with a rather odd inspiration—an Iron Maiden poster featuring a futuristic zombie cowboy. "I just saw that on the wall and was just like, 'That's the coolest thing ever,'" the London troubador says. "And then when somebody told me it was a band, my mind kind of fell apart and I started getting into music."

Turner ended up playing in hardcore bands, including a two-album run as lead singer/screamer for Million Dead. After the band split, the young metalhead spent the next 18 months booking solo shows anywhere someone would let him play. With just a guitar, his music veered into the territory of musicians he'd begun listening to—Josh Rouse, Neil Young, Bruce Springsteen. Despite his punk attitude, it was a scary venture.

"When you play in hardcore bands and things go wrong, you have two options," he says. "Option number one is to just make loads of noise and scream and roll around on the floor. Option number two is to just blame it all on the drummer. When it's just you, you can't do either of those things."

Even with an acoustic guitar, Turner's punk roots still show on his third solo record, *Poetry of the Deed*, especially when he spits out the title track's earnest manifesto: "Pentameter in attack, iambic pulse in the veins, free verse powered of the street light mains / An Iliad played out without a shadow of doubt between the end of the club, yeah, and the sun coming out ... Enough with words and technical theses, let's grab life by the throat and live it to pieces."

FRANK TURNER
HOMETOWN: London
ALBUM: *Poetry of the Deed*
FOR FANS OF: Joe Strummer, Billy Bragg, early Bruce Springsteen

The album is full of vivid, passionate, literate punk tunes that call us to "forget about the haircuts, the stupid skinny jeans, the stampedes and the irony, the media-fed scenes." But its vim and vigor is made all the more refreshing by a sweet and honest appeal to his parents called "Faithful Son" and a tender love song called "The Fastest Way Back Home."

"The last thing that I want to do is to be getting up on stage and singing about something that I don't believe in or something that I'm not bothered about anymore," Turner says. "So I guess I just kind of sift through things that happen and find the things that piss me off enough to put the pen onto a paper, and there we go until we have songs." **JOSH JACKSON**

CAPGUN COUP
THE YOUNG & THE RESTLESS

By the time Sam Martin finally wakes up, it's 2:30 on a lazy Nebraska afternoon. The lead vocalist of Capgun Coup rubs his eyes and sweeps his blond hair off his forehead before joining his bandmates on the couch in his mother's garage in Omaha's Benson district. Martin, like most of his bandmates, prefers night to day, whiskey to water and playing music to working. "We all kind of have the same attitude about music," keyboardist Greg Elsasser says. "It's kind of like a lifestyle."

After spending their high-school years in the suburbs of west Omaha, Martin, Elsasser and drummer Eric Ohlsson decided they'd had enough. "All small towns have a 'let's get out of here' syndrome," Martin says. "And it's a lot easier to get out of there if there's someplace else in the same city to go to." They traveled 100 blocks east of where they grew up with bassist Roadie and guitarist Jesse McKelvey and began waging war on the lives they once lived.

CAPGUN COUP
HOMETOWN: Omaha, Neb.
ALBUM: *Maudlin*
MEMBERS: Greg Elsasser (vocals, keyboards), Sam Martin (vocals, guitar), Jesse McKelvey (guitar), Eric Ohlsson (drums), Roadie (bass)
FOR FANS OF: Black Lips, The Beach Boys, Jay Reatard

Capgun Coup's 2007 debut, *Brought to You by Nebraskafish*, introduced listeners to these restless voices of a new slacker generation. But on *Maudlin*, their latest album, the band has honed its surfy garage rock, uniting the pop sensibilities of The Beach Boys with the sonic irreverence of the lo-fi punk greats. Songs like "Only The Times Are Changing," an ode to America's desperation for change, and the deliberately un-PC rant "Wish I Was a Fag" offer a glimpse of the band's playful songwriting and devil-may-care attitude.

Sitting in the garage amongst band gear and Martin family relics, biding time before they head out to Midtown to hang with friends, it's clear the band members will never live the lives of their parents. "We work shit jobs just so we can pay rent, but the bigger goal is to tour and make records," Elsasser says. "That's kind of my goal—to do whatever the fuck I want with music whenever I want." **LIZ STINSON**

lifeStyle

evolution OF THE hipster 2000-2009

photography by JOSH MEISTER

2000
THE EMO
THE PROTO-HIPSTER'S WHITE BELT AND GUYLINER MAKE FOR A SOULFUL COMBINATION.

2001
THE EMO REDUX
THE SKULLS ON HER TOUR-ONLY DEATH CAB TEE DON'T MATCH THE SKULLS ON HER VANS, SO IT'S NOT LIKE SHE'S TRYING TOO HARD.

2002
THE ASHTON
HIS PBR TRUCKER HAT AND FAUX VINTAGE T-SHIRT REVEAL AN OBSESSION WITH "IRONY."

2003
THE SCENESTER
A GAUDY TATTOO APPEARS ON HER CHEST, AND SHE IS NEVER SPOTTED WITHOUT HER IPOD.

2004
THE TWEE
HE ADORES HIS RARE-VINYL COLLECTION AND TOBACCO PIPE. DESPITE HIS 20/20 VISION, HE WEARS BUDDY HOLLY GLASSES.

2000 2001 2002 2003 2004

2005
THE FAUXHEMIAN
SHE SUFFERS FOR FASHION, WEARING A FURRY HAT, BOOTS AND KEFFIYAH EVEN DURING THE WARMEST MONTHS. HER NEW WRIST TATTOO IS THE JAPANESE SYMBOL FOR BEAUTY—OR AT LEAST THAT'S WHAT THE GUY AT THE TAT SHOP TOLD HER.
2006
THE MOUNTAIN MAN
HE SEEKS WORKING-CLASS AUTHENTICITY, TAKING PRIDE IN HIS FULL BEARD AND THE FACT THAT HE'S OFTEN MISTAKEN FOR A HOMELESS PERSON.
2007
THE VINTAGE QUEEN
SHE SHOPS AT RETRO BOUTIQUES AND POSTS HOLGA PHOTOS ON HER BLOG. SHE HAS SAID THAT THE KOI FISH COVER-UP TATTOO ON HER ARM SYMBOLIZES "NATURE AND LOVE AND PEACE AND STUFF."
2008
THE WILLIAMSBURG
HE THOUGHTFULLY HANGS SHUTTER SHADES IN THE DEEP-V OF HIS WHITE TEE, AND HE'S OFTEN SEEN WALKING HIS FIXED-GEAR BIKE AROUND TOWN WHILE TEXTING WITH HIS IPHONE.
2009
THE META-NERD
BY WEARING THE POPULAR THREE WOLF MOON T-SHIRT, TODAY'S HIPSTER MAKES A MOCKERY OF HERSELF. SHE HAS FINALLY COMPLETED HER FULL-SLEEVE TATTOO.
SPARKS
2005
2006
2007
2008
2009

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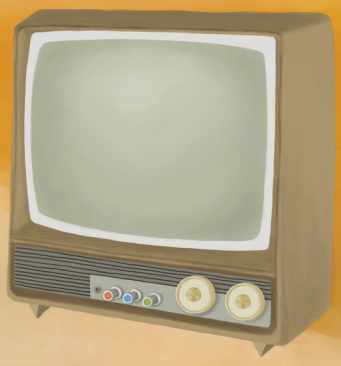
Best of the Decade

{ OUR FAVORITE CULTURAL ARTIFACTS FROM 2000-2009 }



MUSIC

BEST of the DECADE

25 Sigur Rós

Med ud i eyrum vid spilum endalaust XL (2008)

With a sprawling Icelandic title you'd swear meant "Drivers use caution: nude jogger crossing," Sigur Rós' fifth full-length balances majestic ethereality and primal, drum-pounding terrestrial fervor. On earlier records, Jónsi Birgisson's crystalline falsetto arrived like wind sifting through branches, brushing gently past and raising gooseflesh. That singular voice has matured into a confident and unmistakably human instrument, to say nothing of the evocative sonic bedrock from which it flutters ever upward.

JASON KILLINGSWORTH

24 The Shins

Chutes Too Narrow

SUB POP (2003)

It wasn't that long ago, really, when the notion of this band changing your life was less the stuff of cringe-inducing Zach Braff screenplays and more plain truth. Today the idea seems just as unlikely as meeting your soulmate in a psychiatrist's waiting room, but by some odd musical alchemy, all of *Chutes Too Narrow*'s unassuming parts—those tweaky guitars, bedroom symphonics and James Mercer's wobbly self-harmonizing—gelled into the kind of album that demands to be proliferated by forcing headphones upon friends (and, yes, quirky potential lovers). **RACHAEL MADDUX**

"I am sorry if anyone was offended by the wardrobe malfunction during the halftime performance at the Super Bowl. It was not intentional and is regrettable."

JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE 2004

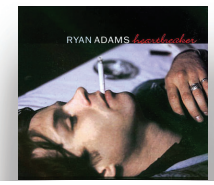
PASTE READERS' POLL

1 Wilco
Yankee Hotel Foxtrot
2 Arcade Fire
Funeral
3 Radiohead *Kid A*
4 Radiohead
In Rainbows
5 Sufjan Stevens
Illinois
6 Postal Service
Give Up
7 Death Cab for Cutie
Transatlanticism
8 White Stripes
Elephant
9 Bon Iver *For Emma Forever Ago*
10 The Avett Brothers
Emotionalism

23 Ryan Adams

Heartbreaker

BLOODSHOT (2000)



Between the simple romance of "Damn, Sam (I Love A Woman That Rains)," the drunken despair of "Come Pick Me Up," the carefree energy of "To Be Young (Is To Be Sad, Is To Be High)" and the nostalgic beauty of Emmylou Harris duet "Oh My Sweet Carolina," Ryan Adams' first solo record teeters satisfyingly between alt-country and plain-old country, rolling out one gem of a song after another. "I love that you can hear the South in Ryan in that record, very clearly," says David Rawlings, who lent his guitar playing and vocal harmonies to the album. "In a way, I feel like *Heartbreaker* captures a time and a place more than any record he's made."

When Rawlings got the record in the mail, he was surprised to see his name on the first track, "Argument with David Rawlings Concerning Morrissey," a random bit of spontaneous studio banter. "We were arguing about which record 'Hairdresser On Fire' was on," Rawlings recalls. "But the song was on *both* records—it's on *Viva Hate* and *Bona Drag*—so there was no actual winner to the bet. Though I'm happy to go double or nothing with Ryan about some other Morrissey song at some point in the future." **KATE KIEFER**

EMO BAND THAT SUCKED THE LEAST

Fall Out Boy, a kiddie-rock quartet with smarter lyrics and sharper hooks than anyone over 17 wanted to admit.

C 22.

The Decemberists
The Crane Wife CAPITOL (2006)

PASTE *HALL OF FAME:* ***This beloved chamber-rock ensemble's major-label debut topped our year-end list back in 2006. Here's what we said about it at the time:*** Forget *sexy*. Although people with an affinity for homesick soldiers, star-crossed lovers and cleaver-wielding gangsters will find plenty to swoon over, The Decemberists are bringing *epic* back—and in a big way. A classic Japanese folk tale is retold in the three-part title track, anchoring a bevy of gorgeous tunes, from the 12-minute prog-folk romp of "The Island" to the post-apocalyptic singalong of "Sons and Daughters." Past releases have proven these fabulous fabulists some of the most innovative, intelligent fledglings in the indie world. But with *The Crane Wife*, The Decemberists really take flight. **RM**

"I've actually broken up with boyfriends for inspiration. When I hit a period of not being able to write music, I walk away."

LILY ALLEN 2009

21 Vampire Weekend
Vampire Weekend XL (2008)

Squawky vocals, ska guitars, trembling basslines, tumbling drums. White boy Afro-pop. *Graceland*. Beach music, dorm music, dinner-party music. Smarty-pants lyrics. New England vacation spots. Sweaters. Linens. The United Colors of Benetton. Proper grammar. Lil Jon! Not colonialism. Not condescension. Real affection, real reverence, real melodies, real songcraft. A glance at the past. A vision of the future. **NICK MARINO**

20 The National
Boxer BEGGARS BANQUET (2007)

On first listen, The National's 2007 breakout album *Boxer* sounds pleasant, evocatively understated and dense with atmosphere. It rewards your attention. So you play it again, from the beginning. After several listens, you've moved beyond basic plot awareness—broken, insecure men and women trying to shake off the malaise of grown-up responsibility, wondering how so many cherished friendships escaped like water from a fist. Now you can finally appreciate the astonishing instrumental nuance and finely chiseled artistic care invested in this timeless record. **JK**

19 Beck
Sea Change INTERSCOPE (2002)

For a man so used to wearing musical masks, Beck laid himself bare on *Sea Change*. It's the most aching, honest album he ever made, a musical breakup memoir on par with *Blood on the Tracks* or *Shoot Out the Lights*. To say his heart was on his sleeve doesn't capture the emotional nakedness; his heart was speared on a record spindle, and he let us all listen as it revolved on the turntable, the stylus reading every single crack. **STEVE LABATE**

SINGLES *we could all* AGREE ON

BY NICK MARINO

1 OutKast
"Hey Ya!"

Andre 3000 is Lennon to Big Boi's McCartney, and this was his very own Ed Sullivan moment. The tune swept the nation, shattered every barrier and achieved platonic musical perfection. Even Dre himself hasn't fully recovered.

2 Kelly Clarkson
"Since U Been Gone"

As far as we can tell, this song is the only good thing *American Idol* has ever produced. But man, what a production! The verses build suspense like a truck hurtling toward a cliff's edge, and the chorus is a giddy free fall, screaming all the way down.

3 Peter Bjorn and John
"Young Folks"

Not long after "Young Folks" came out, *Paste* editor-in-chief Josh Jackson was walking down the street in Minneapolis whistling the first part of the hook when a stranger whistled the rest right back at him. That's when we knew it was gonna be big.

4 Gnarls Barkley
"Crazy"

Cee-Lo's walloping vocals stole the show on this one. But Danger Mouse's indelible bass line—*boom, boom-boom*—would've created a monster with Perry Como singing lead.

5 M.I.A.
"Paper Planes"

A totally unexpected hit, "Paper Planes" broke M.I.A.'s career wide open. The song itself crackles with equal parts desperation and swagger. Robbery at gunpoint never sounded so good.

MUSIC

"We take our craft—whether it be the music, the lyrics, or the photos and artwork—very seriously, as do most artists. It is therefore sickening to know that our art is being traded like a commodity rather than the art that it is. From a business standpoint, this is about piracy—aka taking something that doesn't belong to you; and that is morally and legally wrong. The trading of such information—whether it's music, videos, photos or whatever—is, in effect, trafficking in stolen goods."

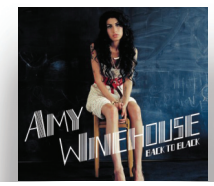
METALLICA DRUMER LARS ULRICH, 2000

18 Amy Winehouse

Back to Black

UNIVERSAL REPUBLIC (2007)

"It sounds like such a wank thing to say, but I need to get some headaches goin' to write about," beehived diva Amy Winehouse said in the raucous months following the release of *Back To Black*—an album that, sure enough, sounded like 50 pounds of headaches shoved into a 10-pound sack.



Winehouse had fallen head-over-stilettos for a runabout ne'er-do-well named Blake Fielder-Civil—marrying him and tattooing his name over her left breast—and their tempestuous relationship evidently brought the pain she required: "Rehab," "You Know I'm No Good," the album's title track and, most poignantly, "Love Is a Losing Game" tapped a bottomless well of soulful sadness, funneling the hurt through a hugely influential amalgam of soul, hip-hop, jazz and R&B.

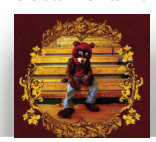
While subsequent starlets Adele and Duffy emerged in her wake, Winehouse lived through a supernova's ascent to megafame and an equally precipitous descent into personal hell. Co-produced by Mark Ronson, backed by Sharon Jones' Dap-Kings and fueled by the demons and tragedies of divas past (think Billie Holiday, Bessie Smith, Martha Reeves), Winehouse rode the zeitgeist hard and was put away wet, concluding what is likely to be her finest musical hour. "Every bad situation is a blues song waiting to happen," Winehouse once insouciantly explained. Lady did, indeed, sing the blues. **COREY DUBROWA**

17 Kanye West

The College Dropout

ROC-A-FELLA (2004)

Every so often, an album rewrites the musical rulebook, and this one effectively murdered gangsta rap. It also redefined what a rapper could look and sound like, expanding the role an MC could play in popular culture. With his precocious debut, the collar-popping, Jesus-walking, beat-making provocateur became a kind of hip-hop prophet, venting about his interior life in a way that spoke for millions. Witty, angry and eminently quotable, *Dropout* kickstarted a four-album streak that made West the most important pop solo artist since Prince. **NM**



Rufus Wainwright

Want One **DREAMWORKS (2003)**

16

PASTE *HALL OF FAME:* ***Wainwright's baroque third album topped our year-end list back in 2003. Here's what we said about it at the time:*** While so many of his peers seem content writing music with narrative arcs bearing all the emotional complexity of an episode of *Saved By The Bell*, Wainwright offers not a sitcom, but a sort of pop musical based on the sordid drama of his own existence. Building on the painstaking songcraft of his 2001 release, *Poses*, the arrangements on *Want One* prove delightfully over-the-top, brimming with soaring operatic peaks and emotional valleys shadowed in almost certain death. **JASON KILLINGSWORTH**

SLAYINGEST LIVE BAND

My Morning Jacket, with its stadium-sized anthems, maximum guitar shred, killer props and costumes, fearless stage presence and inventive covers of everything from Erykah Badu to the Misfits.

15 Patty Griffin

1000 Kisses **ATO (2002)**

After showing promise on her sparse mid-'90s debut, *Living with Ghosts*, and then delving into more rocking territory with *Flaming Red* and the unreleased *Silver Bell*, singer/songwriter Patty Griffin pared back, recording most of *1000 Kisses* live in the studio and delivering what remains the album of her career. Her voice flat out slays, its beauty and power on display whether she's performing her own compositions or interpreting others'. And the songs display a mastery that places her alongside Dylan, Cohen, et al. Griffin mines the mundane and finds the rich meaning in its details. On "Making Pies," when she sings, "Did I show you this picture of my nephew / Taken at his big birthday surprise?"—she transforms clunky conversation into poetry.

TIM REGAN-PORTER

The Strokes *Is This It* RCA (2001)

It's 2001. *Hybrid Theory*, Linkin Park's shouty, self-pitying debut, is the best-selling album in America. This same year, five young men cast turn-of-the-century rock into stark relief with a half-hour-long album of 11 swaggering, scruffy pop songs—a fictional greatest-hits collection that seemed to capture everything great about underground 1970s rock. *Is This It* might not have toppled the nü-metal Goliaths in terms of sales, but it saved rock 'n' roll from the bloat that seemed inescapable in the Fred Durst era.

Assertive but not boorish, charming but not sleazy, ironic but not empty, The Strokes' debut was as cool and arrogant as it had the right to be—as it suddenly seemed, once again, that rock music *had* to be. Julian Casablancas' ambivalent lyrics and the band's pinpoint precision rendered the album both wry and accessible. The record's mood and attitude—those ineffable, un-reproducible qualities—solidified its status as a masterpiece. By 2001, modern rock had become so generic as to be placeless, but the first time you played *Is This It*, you heard the elusive, seductive sound of New York, a city devastated by 9/11 that somehow lost none of its gritty allure. *Is This It*, it turned out, was—and is—as dynamic, soulful and enduring as the city itself. **MARK KROTOV**

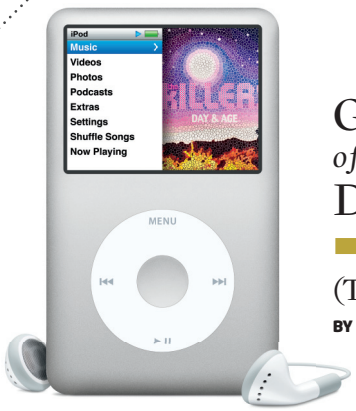
14.

13 Josh Ritter

The Animal Years

V2 (2006)

After the latter third of the 20th century became littered with "new Dylans," it became obvious that no one could ever fill that role. So when Ritter made his first few strummy, literate records, there were no lofty expectations to keep him from developing his talent and fanbase. After three promising albums, the masterpiece arrived. Recorded with producer Brian Deck, who stretched Ritter's rootsy folk in more ambitious directions, *The Animal Years* is bookended by a pair of epic ballads—"Girl in the War" and "Thin Blue Flame"—which helped secure his place at the table of great songwriters without ever having to live in anybody's shadow. **JOSH JACKSON**



GADGET *of the* DECADE

(The iPod, duh)

BY PHIL KLOER

Digital music was already swinging when Apple introduced its signature device in 2001, but the iPod (enabled by its software buddy, iTunes, with its grandma-friendly syncing) mainstreamed and legalized the revolution. Who needed a shelf full of CDs when you could carry all of pop culture—first music, then TV and movies—in your pocket, accessing everything with ridiculous ease?

Filling a need we didn't know we had, the little beveled box hit the sweet spot of form and function. It drove two of the decade's biggest obsessions: portability and personalization. And there was nothing on it that we didn't want on it—beauty is in the iPod of the beholder.

In its early days, the gadget was an instant icon of cool. Then everybody from the Pope to your dad got one, and those white earbuds were no longer the hip fashion accessory they had been in '03—the iPod had transitioned from a cult object to an essential accoutrement of modern life. Not having a pod was like not having a microwave: unthinkable.

In *The Perfect Thing*, Steven Levy's book about how the iPod conquered the world, John Mayer said the device "changed the chemistry of listening." With the shuffle feature and easy skipping, it's all one big celestial jukebox. There are no boundaries, only playlists.

Five years into the pod's reign, a research firm polled college students about the top "in thing" on campus. The iPod was #1. Tied for #2? Facebook and beer.

Spoon *Kill the Moonlight* MERGE (2002)

12.

BY DAVID BAZAN

The first time I heard *Kill the Moonlight* in my friend's car, I was so jealous. I couldn't recall a more satisfying minimalism on any record. For all its swagger, to have the coolest drummer in rock sit the album openers out struck me as the ultimate in not giving a shit on a record that seemed to be about not giving a shit as a way of life. Who needs concern when you can make music as cool as this? But after dozens of spins, the thing that hits me most is what a calculated, careful record it really is. All of Britt Daniel's and Jim Eno's deep musical and personal concerns are there; they're just implied. *Kill the Moonlight* has so much depth because it subtly reveals that Spoon *does* give a shit, they just want you to have to dig through some very sexy music to feel it. Fucking introverts.

ONLINE *Control*, by David Bazan's band Pedro The Lion, appears on Paste's 50 Best albums of the decade at PasteMagazine.com/November09.

MUSIC

"Ever since I was born, Daddy has been the best father you could ever imagine—and I just want to say I love him, so much."

PARIS JACKSON AT HER FATHER'S FUNERAL, 2009

11 The Hold Steady

Boys and Girls in America

VAGRANT (2006)

The early promise of The Hold Steady came to full fruition on this career milestone that made classic rock cool again. Craig Finn's story songs about desperate losers and God-obsessed hedonists were as literate as ever, Tad Kubler rocketed power chords to the back of the arena, and Franz Nicolay added vintage E Street Band keyboard fills. And thanks to a full slate of killer melodies, this time the boys and girls could not only chant along—they could sing along, too. **ANDY WHITMAN**

10 M.I.A.

Arular INTERSCOPE (2005)

In a decade largely defined by South Asia's geo-political emergence, Sri Lankan-raised Maya Arulpragasam seized the moment. Her thrilling, slang-tangled debut connected musical and political rebellion, forcing the first world to acknowledge the third. This was dance music about hostage situations. This was *Fear of a Black Planet* for a new century. This was serious. M.I.A. sang like a schoolgirl skipping through a hopscotch court while sniper fire rang out overhead—not oblivious to the danger, just defiant. **NM**

9 The Avett Brothers

I and Love and You

COLUMBIA/AMERICAN (2009)

For their artistic breakthrough, these North Carolina howlers polished their scruffy Americana sound until it gleamed. The result: an overpowering acoustic album brimming with sadness and soul. "I was worried that I'd start crying while listening at work, but I waited until I got home," a *Paste* colleague told me. That's an accomplishment. The title track—a meditation on three little words—is a three-hanky affair unto itself. **NM**

7 Gillian Welch

Time (the Revelator)

ACONY (2001)

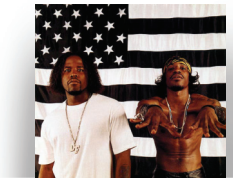
More convincingly than anyone in the last decade, Welch and her partner David Rawlings dipped their ladle into the pot of old-timey American music. On the reflective *Time (the Revelator)*, as their striking vocals wrap tautly around each other, a hushed epic unfolds. The spirited "Red Clay Halo"—a gorgeously simple rumination on poverty, sin and redemption—captures the essence of the duo's timeless songs: "And it's under my nails and it's under my collar / And it shows on my Sunday clothes / Though I do my best with the soap and the water / but the damned old dirt won't go." Welch and Rawlings can't seem to get the dirt out of their music, either. And thank goodness for that. **KK**

MOST HAUNTING VIDEO

Johnny Cash's "Hurt," which alternates shots of a battle-worn Cash near the end of his life with images from his early years. Capped by wife June gazing down from the staircase on her weary lover, the video lingers years after its making.

8 Outkast

Stankonia ARISTA/LAFACE (2000)



Stankonia is OutKast's edgiest and most inspired record, a collection of infinitely catchy pop songs, groundbreaking hip-hop/techno fusion, lighthearted sexual honesty, political acumen and jazzy canvasses for lyrical innovation. Witness the electrifying rap/rock of opening track "Gasoline Dreams," with it's Hendrix-style riffing and urgent rhymes: *"I hear that Mother Nature's now on birth control / The coldest pimp be looking for somebody to hold / The highway up to heaven got a crook on the toll / Youth full of fire ain't got nowhere to go! Nowhere to go!"*

Mother Nature on birth control? In this one line, Dre and Big Boi sum up two decades of haphazard clear-cut sprawl in Atlanta, using their hometown as a microcosm for the hopeless bleakness of urban—and now suburban—America.

While *Stankonia* explodes out of the gates with youthful vigor, by the end—as the weight of tragedies and inequalities and broken promises eat away at OutKast's optimism and energy—the album slows to a crawl; musically, the only other works comparable to songs like teen-pregnancy/suicide ballad "Toilet Tisha" and the hypnotic "Slum Beautiful" are Funkadelic's "Maggot Brain" and the end of Frank Zappa's *Joe's Garage*. **STEVE LABATE**

6 The White Stripes

Elephant V2 (2003)

With three bands and one coal miner's daughter, Jack White released a stellar album nearly every year of this decade, each exploring a new facet of his fierce, ever-deepening, hard-boiled rock agenda. The one exception was 2002, but we'll forgive him—it seems he spent the year laying low, preparing The White Stripes' finest work to date, 2003's mind-curdling *Elephant*. His and Meg's first proper major-label release banished any suspicions that they were a peppermint-swathed novelty act, instead sublimating their early lo-fi brattiness into a taut collection of 14 pummeling garage-rock gems. In terms of frequency, consistency and sheer quality, few musicians rival White's claim as Artist of the Aughts. Here's how he made the decade his own. **RM**

5 Bright Eyes

I'm Wide Awake, It's Morning

SADDLE CREEK (2005)

With *Wide Awake*, the one-time prince of emo finally grew up, and—as much as any one artist could during

a decade of such cultural fragmentation—became the inadvertent spokesman for his aimless generation. The poetry of Conor Oberst's lyrics captured the hearts of fellow twentysomethings with their urgent, exhausted, lovesick and thought-lost wonder. It felt like he was collectively singing our own minds—asking the big questions, confronting a culture of fear, searching for new beginnings, wrestling with God and truth and innocence lost. **SL**

4 Radiohead

Kid A CAPITOL (2000)

Considering what it was up against, the fact that this album made our list is a small

miracle. *Kid A* had both the unfortunate task of following one of the greatest albums of all time (1997's *OK Computer*) and the gall to mark the watershed artistic transition toward more electronic-based experimentation for one of the world's greatest rock 'n' roll bands. Indeed, everything had to be in its right place. And it was. **AUSTIN L. RAY**

3 Arcade Fire

Funeral MERGE (2004)

Rock's back pages are cluttered with memorable paens to loss: lost love (Derek

and the Dominos' *Layla and Other Assorted Songs*), innocence lost (Springsteen's *Born to Run*), dead homies (Ice Cube's *Kill at Will*). This feisty crew of Canadians and American runaways joined that illustrious company the moment they crashed into our collective consciousness with their kinetic debut album, which payed tribute to fallen loved ones, delivered a suite of "Neighborhood" songs that served as a proxy for disappearing family and community, and implored everyone still living here on Earth to wake the hell up. **CD**

2000
The White Stripes, *De Stijl*

2001
The White Stripes, *White Blood Cells*; White founds Third Man Records

2003
The White Stripes, *Elephant*; White contributes to *Cold Mountain* soundtrack and appears in the film

2004
White Produces and performs on Loretta Lynn's *Van Lear Rose*

2005
The White Stripes, *Get Behind Me Satan*

2006
The Raconteurs, *Broken Boy Soldiers*

2007
The White Stripes, *Icky Thump*

2008
The Raconteurs, *Consolers of the Lonely*; White records "Another Way to Die" with Alicia Keys for Bond flick *Quantum of Solace*

2009
The Dead Weather, *Horehound*; White Stripes tour film *Under the Great White Northern Lights* premieres at Toronto Film Festival; White stars in guitar love-note doc *It Might Get Loud* with Jimmy Page and U2's The Edge

2. Wilco

Yankee Hotel Foxtrot

NONESUCH (2002)

By now, the story of this album has become rock 'n' roll lore like Brian Wilson's sandbox and "Paul is dead." In brief: Once upon a time, the acclaimed Chicago rock band Wilco delivered an album called *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* to Reprise, its longtime label, a subsidiary of Warner Bros. Terrified by the album's squalling feedback and abstract songcraft, Reprise executives ran screaming from the room. Ultimately, they decided to

let the band go. Soon after, Wilco streamed the record for free online. The album was met with raves from both fans and critics, and was eventually picked up by Nonesuch, an artier subsidiary of the same parent company. "There was a common perception and irony," Nonesuch senior VP David Bither says today, "of one Warner label passing on the record and letting the band go out of its contract for very little cost, and another Warner label picking it up and putting it out. In other words, paying for it twice."

On that level, *Yankee* has come to represent everything that's wrong with the music business: tone-deaf executives, a gross misunderstanding of online music, an institutionalized pandering to the lowest common denominator that obstructed the release of a timeless rock classic. And yet, on another level, *Yankee*'s success means that the system works. The record *did* come out, full of glorious static and muffled drums and conflicted patriotism. People *did* buy it. Wilco's frontman, Jeff Tweedy, got to keep his ambiguous lyrics—he got to start the album by singing "I am an American aquarium drinker," and after a while that didn't seem so very weird. Everyone pretty much got it.

"Some of it at the time seemed very topical," Bither says. "Here we were with a record that was being toured for the first time and performed for the first time literally days after 9/11. ... That moment, those months, were a time when we were looking not for answers, certainly, but looking for questions."

The album asked questions both of its audience and its corporate backers. And the response told us everything we needed to know about the music industry in the 2000s. Through its circuitous provenance and runaway success, *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* proved that great art—even in difficult times—will find the light of day. **NM**

PRODUCER OF THE DECADE

Danger Mouse, whose *Grey Album* defined the mash-up movement, whose Gorillaz records fused Britpop to hip-hop, and whose Gnarls Barkley project unleashed one of the all-time great pop singles.

1 Sufjan Stevens

Illinois ASTHMATIC KITTY (2005)

ON THE ROAD TO FIND OUT

BY KATE KIEFER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY DENNY RENSHAW

FROM ILLINOIS...

In 2005, when Sufjan Stevens released *Illinois*, the second album in his planned 50-state project, American pride was at a record low—especially among young people. The death toll in Iraq was steadily climbing, and Abu Ghraib was fresh on our minds. Meanwhile, Stevens was beginning to seem brilliant enough to fulfill his ambitious plan. His music pushed boundaries between pop and classical, and the emotional weight of his lyrics grounded his feather-light voice. There was a distinct peculiarity about *Illinois* and Stevens himself, who gave his songs titles like "To the Workers of the Rock River Valley Region, I Have an Idea Concerning Your Predicament." Critics embraced the mystery and declared the album a masterpiece. Stevens and his band, The Illinoisemakers, wore cheerleading costumes onstage to promote the record, and once its success took them to larger venues, Stevens switched to giant, colorful bird wings. His band was a spectacle, their performances magical. Thousands of fans gathered in theaters across the country to behold this winged creature and rally behind his songs about America's heartland. It was a new, weird kind of patriotism.

Stevens collected facts and anecdotes about the great state of Illinois, stringing them together in ambitious rhyme schemes and wrapping them in meticulous arrangements. "Decatur, or, Round Of Applause For Your Stepmother" is superficially a song about a city, but beneath the textbook trivia is Stevens' story of reconciling with his father's wife. The gut-wrenching "Casimir Pulaski Day" is about a friend dying of bone cancer, and "The Seer's Tower" looks at idol worship from the perspective of Chicago's tallest building. And then there's "John Wayne Gacy, Jr.," the hushed, nightmare-inducing acoustic song about the rapist and serial killer who preyed on teenaged boys, hiding their bodies under the floorboards in his Chicago home. "His father was a drinker and his mother cried in bed / Folding John Wayne's T-shirts when the swing set hit his head," Stevens sang, referencing a true story—at 11, Gacy was hit in the head by a swing. But the song's conclusion is what got people talking: "And in my best behavior, I am really just like him," Stevens half-whispered as the music quieted behind him. "Look beneath the floorboards for the secrets I have hid." It was startlingly confessional, "a remark about potential more than anything else," the songwriter says now. "We're all capable of what he did." In that particular moment of that particular song, Stevens removed all the intricate instrumentation from his music. He removed his fact-sheet façade and his cheerleader uniform and his bird wings. He was stark naked in front of an audience that turned out to be much wider than he'd expected—for all its idiosyncrasies, *Illinois* sold more than 300,000 copies, according to Nielsen SoundScan.

Burned by the spotlight, Stevens retreated after *Illinois*. As anxious fans searched for clues pointing to New York, Washington or New Jersey, expecting another masterful concept album right around the corner, he dabbled in a few side projects but showed no signs of picking up where he left off with Project U.S.A. "The whole premise was such a joke," he

says now, "and I think maybe I took it too seriously. I started to feel like I was becoming a cliché of myself." Whether or not Stevens ever intended to make a record for every state, he ended up completely derailed by a new project—one people thought was just another whim.

TO BROOKLYN...

Joseph Melillo, executive director of The Brooklyn Academy of Music, had seen Stevens (a Brooklyn resident) perform the *Illinois* songs in concert. "He was the one artist who as a singer/songwriter impressed me the most," Melillo says. "He engaged me with his unique view of the world and his writing—both compositionally and as a musician—but also the words and the language that he was using. I wanted to invest in his creative imagination." So Melillo invited Stevens to help BAM celebrate the 25th anniversary of its Next Wave Festival, which showcases contemporary, nontraditional performing arts. The commission was simple: Compose a piece about Brooklyn.

The Brooklyn-Queens Expressway is a controversial highway. It displaced thousands of New Yorkers during construction in the '40s and '50s, and it's widely regarded as an eyesore. The road is also dangerous, due to narrow lanes and sharp curves. "Everyone's always complaining about it, but it's interesting that it runs through the entire borough, sort of the one thing that is constant," Stevens says. "I just liked that it seemed to be a running theme physically and conceptually, and it has beautiful views of Brooklyn and of Manhattan." It was settled: Stevens would call his performance *The BQE*.

"I think that he surprised himself, to be truthful," says Melillo, who called occasionally to check in while Stevens was writing. "He kept saying how intensive it was for him. This is the element of surprise—how deeply he went into his art. That he was living, drinking and sleeping the BQE. That the creative endeavor, the engagement, was occupying his entire life."

Stevens composed a soundtrack to accompany a film built around footage of the highway. The three-night performance in November 2007 was a true multimedia experience—complete with 35 musicians, strobe lights and interpretive hula-hoop dancing, it was Stevens' most ambitious undertaking yet, an intensely creative self-reflection from a man who had realized his potential. At times *The BQE* sounds like a symphony—his classical compositions are instantly relatable, taking cues from great American composers like Copland and Gershwin—but Stevens' pop proclivity is alive and well. He explores jazz and electronic music, too, and sprinkles his compositions with the whimsical flutes and horns we've come to expect. The powerful suite relates the expressway's sharp curves, the moments of panic when its lanes get too narrow, the speedups and slowdowns of traffic, and the beautiful views of New York's finest neighborhoods. In one pair of songs, "Movement III: Linear Tableau With Intersecting Surprise" and "Movement IV: Traffic Shock," Stevens performs a melody using classical instrumentation and then abruptly turns the same line into an electronic track, defying genre confines and proving that a good melody transcends instrumentation—and words and time and place.

The performance ended, but Stevens couldn't get off the expressway—the BQE had seeped into every aspect of his artistic life. "In all honesty, that piece is what really sabotaged my creative momentum. It wasn't *Illinois* so much," he says. "I suffered sort of an existential creative crisis after that piece. I no longer knew what a song was and how to write an album. It overextended me in a way that I couldn't find my way back to the song."

Melillo isn't surprised. "It's the magnitude of what he accomplished ... he allowed his creative imagination to just unfold. It's almost like Wagner—it's *so* big that you think about what is going to happen next in his creative life, and it makes sense. Something new opened up for him, and now he has to go back to his source material—what is it to be a singer/songwriter, to be more intimate in his storytelling and singing for an audience, and what does that mean to him?" he says. "Like any artist who creates a work of significance, it simply takes time to regenerate."

"Why are songs three or four minutes? Why are records 40 minutes long? They're based on the record, vinyl, the CD, and these forms are antiquated now. So can't an album be eternity, or five minutes? I no longer have faith in the album. I no longer have faith in the song."

...AND BEYOND

Meanwhile, the Internet was doing its best to make LPs obsolete, pushing Stevens further and further from the kind of songwriting he's hardly attempted since *Illinois*. "I'm wondering, why do people make albums anymore when we just download? Why are songs like three or four minutes, and why are records 40 minutes long? They're based on the record, vinyl, the CD, and these forms are antiquated now. So can't an album be eternity, or can't it be five minutes?" He pauses. "I no longer really have faith in the album anymore. I no longer have faith in the song."

Stevens tested his faith during a stint of live shows in September and October, working through the confusion with song forms that were 10 minutes or more, both with and without lyrics. He hasn't found the next step in his creative progression, but returning to the narrative songwriting of *Illinois* is out of the question—it would mean denying the enlightenment he experienced at BAM.

This fall, Stevens will release a CD soundtrack of *The BQE* along with a DVD of the footage and a stereoscopic 3-D Viewmaster reel. In the liner notes, he writes, "And then it hits you: If skyscrapers are the ultimate phallic symbols, then the urban expressway is the ultimate birth canal, the uterine wall, the anatomical passageway, the ultimate means of egress, and the process by which we are all born again. The BQE is the Motherhood of Civilization, the Breast of Being, the fallopian tube, the biological canal from which all of life emerges in resplendent beauty, newborn and newly fashioned with the immaculate countenance of a baby." And maybe there's something to that. *Illinois* is what it is—a necessary part of a creative journey that cannot end in the same place it started. Untethered by musical tradition, the expectations of his fans and the prospect of record sales, Stevens changed direction; he was reborn. It happened somewhere on that treacherous expressway, long after he left Illinois.

FILM

BEST of the DECADE

25 *Pan's Labyrinth*

GUILLERMO DEL TORO, PICTUREHOUSE (2006)

Mexican director Guillermo del Toro's vision of what's, ostensibly, a childhood fable hews closer to the dark corners of the young mind (think the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen) than any squeaky-clean Disney versions. Our determined heroine, little Ofelia, maintains a fantastical imagination—filled with fairies like insects and a benevolent yet nightmarish fawn—even in the face of a facistic stepfather. **ANDY BETA**

24 *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

JOEL AND ETHAN COEN, TOUCHSTONE (2000)

T-Bone Burnett's soundtrack got all the attention, but this twist on Homer's *Odyssey*—

set in Depression Era Mississippi—had all the effortless storytelling, imaginative characters and quotable lines we've come to love from the Coen Brothers' best comedies, with George Clooney joining a celebrated list of Coen comic leads. Holly Hunter and John Goodman basically reprise their hilarious *Raising Arizona* roles, only with more kids. And an eyepatch. **JOSH JACKSON**

23 *Traffic*

STEVEN SODERBERGH, USA FILMS (2000)

Steven Soderbergh's simulated documentary about modern drug culture twists and glides with a calculation as deep and complex as the cavernous topic it so effectively dissects. Ever the visionary, Soderbergh displays an objective, impartial eye (quite literally—he photographed the film as

Peter Andrews), digging into his characters' explosive trajectories as they reach their tragic and ambiguous ends, and leaving us with more questions than answers. **SEAN EDGAR**

22 *Dogville* LARS VON TRIER, LIONSGATE FILMS (2003)

When Lars von Trier pits idealism against human selfishness, the latter always wins. His hubristic characters become what they hate by inescapable degrees. *Dogville* is his most trenchant polemic, with a minimal black-box theater set cultivating fevered lucidity. It's about a town that destroys a woman by loving her, and a woman who loves a town by destroying it. In von Trier's world, idealism inevitably leads to ruin, and there are only two kinds of people: martyrs and buffoons. **BRIAN HOWE**

> "I never had money, and I was very happy without it. When I die, my money's not gonna come with me. My movies will live on—for people to judge what I was as a person."
>
> **HEATH LEDGER**, 2007

21 *In the Loop* ARMANDO IANNUCCI, IFC FILMS (2009)

If clever verbal humor were easy, we'd have more comedies like *In the Loop*. But it's not, and this one stands in a class of its own. It's the most quotable film of the decade—by miles—and the cynical potty mouths on screen are so articulate and creative that, after the avalanche of witticisms, you're left with the lingering sense that you've seen not just a funny movie but also a wicked political satire of the highest order, the kind where the absurdity speaks for itself. **ROBERT DAVIS**

COLDEST-HEARTED VILLAN

Daniel Day-Lewis' knife-throwing, top-hat-wearing, scenery-chewing Bill The Butcher in *Gangs of New York*.

FILM

20 *Elephant*

GUS VAN SANT, HBO FILMS (2003)

The immense tragedy of 9/11 defined this decade, but 1999's Columbine massacre remains haunting for its intimacy.

Van Sant's dramatization is almost unbearably fragile, an exquisite exercise in mood and tone—it's as though he turned a horror movie into a poem. His steadicam sweeps the high-school hallways, and what you notice most is the eerie stillness, the deafening silence. When the killing comes, it's brutally matter-of-fact: a fall from grace, a serenity violated. **NICK MARINO**

19 *4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days*

CRISTIAN MUNGUI, IFC FILMS (2007)

With eerily realistic performances and stunning direction, *4 Months, 3 Weeks, and 2 Days* combines an uncomfortably forthright discussion

of abortion with long, virtuosic handheld camera takes. In Cristian Mungui's hand, these shots are more than just a gimmick; they position the audience behind the camera and refuse to let us look away from the horrors on screen. At times, it's difficult to watch, but few films have ever displayed as perfect a marriage of form and content. **SEAN GANDERT**

18 *Syndromes and a Century*

APICHATPONG WEERASETHAKUL, STRAND RELEASING (2006)

Thai filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul doesn't mind if you call him "Joe." It's a strategy he picked up while living in Chicago. He studied architecture in Thailand and

filmmaking in the windy city, and his experience straddling two cultures informs his tender, highly experimental films. They're objects of beauty that cleave in the middle. In one moment, his camera is idling in a verdant Asian village, and in the next it's gazing through portals of time, like the mind-blowing films of Kubrick or Antonioni. *Syndromes* is the oblique story of how his parents met. They're both physicians, and the film tells their story twice, each time following them from a rural clinic to a modern hospital, as if they too straddled worlds. **RD**

17 *Memento*

CHRISTOPHER NOLAN, NEWMARKET FILMS (2000)

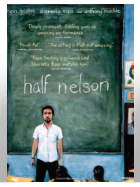
During a brutal attack in which he believes his wife was raped and murdered, insurance-fraud investigator Leonard Shelby (played with unequivocal intensity, frustration and panic by Guy Pearce) suffers head trauma so severe it leads to his inability to retain new memories for

more than a few minutes. This device allows Nolan to brilliantly deconstruct traditional cinematic storytelling, toggling between chronological black-and-white vignettes and full-color five-minute segments that unfold in reverse order while Pearce frantically searches for his wife's killer. The film is jarring, inventive and adventurous, and the payoff is every bit worth the mindbending descent into madness. **STEVE LABATE**

16 *Half Nelson*

RYAN FLECK, THINKFILM (2006)

The debut feature film by Ryan Fleck and Anna Boden is a compelling personal story about a high-school teacher who's failing himself and his students. It's a rich political allegory for the liberal malaise of the Bush era, and it's a sly subversion of a tired Hollywood cliché. Fleck and Boden wrote the script, edited the footage and directed at least three best-of-decade performances from their young cast (Ryan Gosling, Anthony Mackie and Shareeka Epps) earning a place on our "must see" list for years to come. **RD**



Half Nelson

15 *Juno*

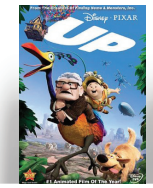
JASON REITMAN, FOX SEARCHLIGHT (2007)

At the center of Diablo Cody's quickly drafted first movie script is a teenage girl going through a difficult situation and handling it with more maturity and aplomb than most of the adults around her. Ellen Page's Juno is a delightful counter to vapid high-school stereotypes that litter the genre, but the challenges of pregnancy and the arrested development of Jason Bateman as the potential adoptive father take the precocious teenager in way over her head. The film's honesty in tackling these issues makes its many laughs well-earned. **JJ**

14 *Up*

PETE DOCTER AND BOB PETERSON, WALT DISNEY PICTURES (2009)

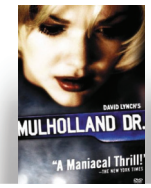
In an oeuvre already overstuffed with classics (*The Incredibles*, *Wall-E*) that enchant both children and parents Pixar's *Up* towers. Instilling heart into a trash compactor was a feat, but a comedic triumvirate consisting of a septuagenarian curmudgeon, a boy scout and an androgynous bird makes for a truly uncanny combo. That the film gracefully alights on abandoned dreams, old age, loss and the burden of domesticity is just the cherry on top. **AB**



13 *Mulholland Drive*

DAVID LYNCH, UNIVERSAL (2001)

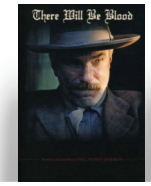
Naomi Watts' soulful and fearless dual performance as a wide-eyed ingénue and a jaded junkie anchors David Lynch's puzzle-box film, an update on mid-century Hollywood vice flicks that twists itself into a powerful tragedy. Only superficially exploitive, *Mulholland Drive* gives its girl-on-girl action a tenderness rarely seen in mainstream sex scenes and never seen in Lynch films. Even as the director further blurs the distinctions between fantasy and reality, he finds the dark heart of this tangled romance. **STEPHEN M. DEUSNER**



12 *There Will Be Blood*

PAUL THOMAS ANDERSON, PARAMOUNT (2007)

There's a whiff of *Citizen Kane* about *There Will Be Blood*. Both Charles Foster Kane, the center of Orson Welles' 1941 masterwork, and Daniel Plainview, the protagonist of Paul Thomas Anderson's 2007 gem, are Shakespearean in their contradictions—too creative and too wounded to be fully condemned, and too ruthless to be fully admired. Like Welles, writer/director Anderson fashioned an original cinematic language to reveal Plainview's strange mix of genius and monstrosity. Long stretches are virtually dialogue-free, but the close-ups of Daniel Day-Lewis' glowering face—splattered with blood, sweat and petroleum—and the long shots of rickety derricks and shacks perched precariously on a savage landscape say more than words ever could. **GEOFFREY HIMES**



MUCKRAKERS *go to the* MOVIES

BY ROBERT DAVIS

Upton Sinclair, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein may have set the standard for muckraking in the 20th century, but their heirs-apparent are more likely to pick up a video camera than a pen when fighting the battles of the 21st. Technological advances have put professional tools into the hands of amateurs, which partly explains why so much muckraking has moved from newspapers to video.

Living in an information-rich society, we've all become skimmers. Reading a book from cover to cover is a luxury fewer and fewer people indulge in, yet the headlines, sound bites, viral videos and tweets that create our daily ambience don't have the depth to help us understand our increasingly complex world. Documentary films, then, have emerged as the muckraking medium du jour: They're short enough that they don't require a major time commitment, but long enough to make a complex argument without interruption.

Whether you think they're ironclad or full of holes, films like *An Inconvenient Truth*, *Sicko*, *Bowling for Columbine*, *Expelled*, *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room*, *The Corporation* and *The Fog of War*—all made in the past decade—present arguments that develop only with time and concentration.

And while the problems they address are too complex for even 90 minutes, a hybrid approach can work. The best example is the recent film *Food, Inc.*, which opened many eyes to the serious problems with our country's food supply, mostly by skimming ideas probed more deeply in the books of Michael Pollan and Eric Schlosser. Having seen the film, newly engaged viewers—energized by its potent, condensed content—might turn to the books themselves, or maybe the authors' blogs, for more information, letting the media work in tandem.

Given the troubled state of theatrical distribution, many documentaries are more likely to be seen at home than at the multiplex. But who will finance them? Even with so many outlets (from traditional theaters and aging broadcast networks to new and unproven avenues like SnagFilms, YouTube and Netflix Instant Queue), most documentarians are unlikely to earn enough to keep working. It's a gap that's yet to be bridged: the distance between the obvious value of hard-nosed reporting and the cost of getting the results in front of an audience.

"This moment is so much bigger than me. This moment is for Dorothy Dandridge, Lena Horne, Diahann Carroll. It's for the women that stand beside me: Jada Pinkett, Angela Basett, Vivica Fox. And it's for every nameless, faceless woman of color that now has a chance because this door tonight has been opened."

HALLE BERRY IN 2002, BECOMING THE FIRST AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMAN TO WIN A BEST-ACTRESS OSCAR

FILM

11 *The Dark Knight*

CHRISTOPHER NOLAN, WARNER BROS. (2008)

Memento director Christopher Nolan surpassed *Batman Begins*' immaculate resurrection of the Caped Crusader with this multi-layered comic flick. In *The Dark Knight*, he orchestrates a pool of crisp performances into a compounded plot that intertwines the rush of the superhero genre with the unnerving drama of a psychological thriller, showcasing Heath Ledger's endearingly heinous embodiment of The Joker, and upping the stakes for all comic-book adaptations to come. **GAGE HENRY**

10 *The Royal Tenenbaums*

WES ANDERSON, BUENA VISTA PICTURES (2001)

With his third movie, Wes Anderson let all his quirks run rampant: a storybook setting that is and is not New York, a uniform for each character and an obsession with childhood detritus. Rather than deflect the family's conflicts (as Anderson's critics claim), these elements only enhance its spiritual conundrums, making *The Royal Tenenbaums* Anderson's most directorially confident and emotionally cathartic film—a bittersweet ode to regret, forgiveness and hard-won contentment. **SD**

8 *The Son*

JEAN-PIERRE AND LUC DARDENNE, NEW YORKER FILMS (2002)

Renowned Belgian filmmaking brothers Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne found the perfect distillation of their stark style with this masterpiece about a man who teaches woodworking to troubled teens. One boy in particular draws his attention, but the brothers parcel out the plot so carefully that watching it unfold is rewarding in itself. The greatest pleasure, though, comes from watching the Dardennes treat the simple details of building a toolbox and the limits of human forgiveness as if they're both vital, and maybe somehow related. **RD**

"America fears the penis, and that's something I'm going to help them get over."

JUDD APATOW 2007

9 *No Country For Old Men*

JOEL AND ETHAN COEN, MIRAMAX (2007)

What is it about the Coen Brothers' inconsolable *No Country for Old Men* that still chills the blood, even under the South Texas sun? No doubt its inscrutability plays a role: Is it a Western, a noir or a morality play? And the Academy Award-winning performance by Javier Bardem disturbs because he himself remains a mystery: Is Anton Chigurh a merciless hitman or the Angel of Death? The story of a drug deal gone wrong soon reveals its true theme: the futility of being good and just in the face of abject evil. But the Coens also meditate on the faltering of the physical body. "Age'll flatten a man," Tommy Lee Jones' Sherrif Bell esteems, and for this Texan, the evocation of my childhood landscape—right down to the tiniest detail—means that the specter of Chigurh will haunt not only the end of my life but stomp through its earliest remembrances as well. **AB**

7 *Lost In Translation*

SOFIA COPPOLA, FOCUS FEATURES (2003)

Fueled by Bill Murray's impeccable performance, Sofia Coppola delivered a picture of sublime nuance for her sophomore effort. The physical and emotional unavailability of spouses, words left unspoken, life's missing purpose, an affair devoid of sex—absence is the looming presence here, and Coppola perfectly captured the ineffable human conditions of dislocation and ennui. *Lost in Translation* is a testament to the power of a raised eyebrow, a gentle touch and a parting whisper. **TIM REGAN-PORTER**

6 *Beau Travail*

CLAIRE DENIS, NEW YORKER FILMS (1999)

French filmmaker Claire Denis has such a keen eye and natural sense of rhythm that her movies often hypnotize viewers even when they aren't following the plot. She's subtle. For *Beau Travail*, Denis transplanted Herman Melville's Billy Budd to the African landscape where she grew up. She gave her movie one of the greatest endings of any film this decade when her lead character—wound tight as a spring—finally allows himself a spastic, joyous moment. Whether it's real or metaphorical isn't clear, but we know this much: It's music. It's dance. It's pure cinema. **RD**

5 *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*

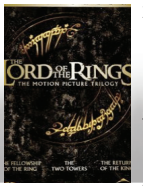
MICHEL GONDRY, FOCUS FEATURES (2004)

Michel Gondry's debut feature, *Human Nature*, was a whimsical dud, but his follow-up suggested a mature, disciplined director with his playful side intact. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* traffics in his signature sleights of hand, which serve two touching and tragic love stories: between red-haired Kate Winslet and a supremely sad Jim Carrey, and between headstrong Kirsten Dunst and a pining Mark Ruffalo. All of their performances—including Gondry's—stay in your memory long after the credits have rolled. **SD**

4 *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy

PETER JACKSON, NEW LINE (2001-2003)

The Lord of the Rings film trilogy took the work J.R.R. Tolkien himself described as "unsuitable for dramatic or semi-dramatic representation" and translated its epic story in a far more literal manner than could've ever been guessed. What comes across in Jackson's adaptation is a passion not just for telling the epic tale, but for telling it correctly. Corners weren't cut for time or expense, nor were compromises made to create a tighter plot and more streamlined experience. In a sprawling 11 hours, the series' meticulous recreation captures the same wonder and awe of the books. We suspect that were he still around, Tolkien would've reconsidered his comment and enjoyed seeing his world on screen just as much as the rest of us. **SG**



3 *Almost Famous*

CAMERON CROWE, DREAMWORKS (2000)

Cameron Crowe's semi-autobiographical film perfectly captured the essence of the world music geeks inhabit—the passion for the music; the joy in the concert experience; the obsession over the tiniest details of melody, lyrics, musicianship, artwork and liner notes; the camaraderie of fans and musicians. But even beyond the resonance that music fans feel, Crowe crafted flawless little scenes, peopled with fully fleshed-out characters who were funny, romantic, heart wrenching and utterly believable. *Almost Famous* is the essential movie for music aficionados, and a great one for anyone who cares about humanity. **TRP**

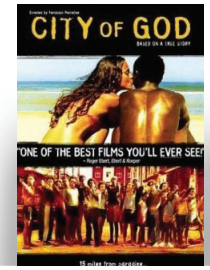
PASTE READERS' POLL

1 *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*
2 *The Royal Tenenbaums*
3 *Amélie*
4 *There Will Be Blood*
5 *Lost in Translation*
6 *Pan's Labyrinth*
7 *Memento*
8 *Almost Famous*
9 *City of God*
10 *The Departed*

City of God FERNANDO MEIRELLES, MIRAMAX (2003)

Originally released in January 2003 to critical praise, Fernando Meirelles' masterful yet brutal *City of God* receded from view until Miramax re-released it for Oscar consideration. And while it failed to even garner a foreign-language-film nomination that year, the alternately intense and intimate depiction of Rio's desperate favelas has only grown in stature and power.

Based on the novel by Paulo Lins (and adapted by Bráulio Mantovani), Meirelles turned an unflinching eye on a world forgotten by the wealthy and powerful, ignored by police and indifferent to law and order. *City of God* set the template for other shocking urban films to follow (not to mention a revival of "favela funk" by music-marauders like Diplo and M.I.A.). But whereas other cinematic studies like *Gomorrah* (about modern Sicily) and the documentary *Dancing with the Devil* only wallowed in such viciousness, this film plunged deeper, gripped harder, and yet always allowed glints of humanity into such darkness.



City of God's harrowing depiction of daily violence in the favelas exemplifies in shocking detail the Hobbesian view of life as "nasty, brutish, and short," but the film never casts judgment. While chaos and bloodshed rule the world of protagonist Rocket and those of his generation—psychotic druglord Li'l Zé, groovy playboy Benny and solemn Knockout Ned (singer Seu Jorge, in his breakout role)—*City of God* elucidates an underlying symmetry, exhibiting if not poetic justice, then the street version of the same. **AB**

2 *Amélie*

JEAN-PIERRE JEUNET, MIRAMAX (2001)

With the face of an angel, the heart of a child and the haircut of a Parisian pixie, do-gooding waitress Amélie Poulain (Audrey Tautou) swept us clean off our feet. Hers was a love story, a French love story—as if it could get more romantic. And her fantastical adventures in the name of love unfolded in flights of magical realism. Indeed, the film held up love itself as both magical and realistic. Which, of course, is how it really is. **NM**

LOCATION OF THE DECADE

The majestic countryside of New Zealand, which provided the backdrop for *Lord of the Rings*, and tender indie film *The Whale Rider*.

RECONSIDERING WOODY

BY GEOFFREY HIMES

The critical consensus is that Woody Allen's career slid downhill after his 1986 film *Hannah and Her Sisters* won three Oscars. The public has eagerly embraced this sentiment, for it's saved everyone the hassle of wrestling with some of the most troubling and powerful American films of the past 23 years.

Match Point, from 2005, is one of Allen's greatest and most disturbing pictures. He allows his four attractive young stars to charm the pants off of us, flirting and joking. But when the flirting leads to sexual betrayal and premeditated murder, Allen defies centuries of fiction-making convention by mostly allowing them to get away with it—without feeling any remorse. What started as a breezy romantic comedy turns into a rare, unflinching look at evil—and, as such, an echo of Allen's greatest film, 1989's *Crimes and Misdemeanors*.

Allen's great late-period pictures—such as *Husbands and Wives* and *Deconstructing Harry* from the '90s, and *Cassandra's Dream* and *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* from the '00s—all feature protagonists who are selfish, dishonest, cowardly, misogynistic, misanthropic and/or egotistical. Again and again, viewers lambasted Allen for condoning his characters' behavior when it was obvious from the arc of the storytelling and the aim of the jokes that the writer/director was ruthlessly, brilliantly skewering these deluded males.

How could filmgoers miss something so obvious? Because they confused Allen the person with the characters he created and often played—just as many listeners thought Randy Newman really was bigoted against "Short People." Even otherwise intelligent folks fell into this trap because they were so upset by the lingering controversy surrounding Allen, his ex-girlfriend Mia Farrow and Farrow's adopted daughter Soon-Yi Previn. It wasn't the first time someone had made great art in the midst of a scandal.

It's true that Allen made some of his worst films during this recent period—2001's *The Curse of the Jade Scorpion* may be the worst of them all—but it's hard to think of another American filmmaker who has made as many powerful films over the past quarter century, and who has been so misunderstood for his efforts.

Can O' Bliss

"Top U.S. Pale Ale"
New York Times

"One of the quintessential American hoppy pale ales of our time." Beeradvocate

"World's Best Canned Beer"
Details Magazine

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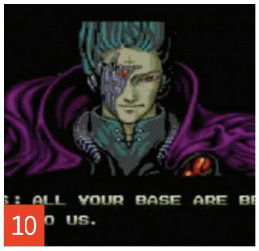

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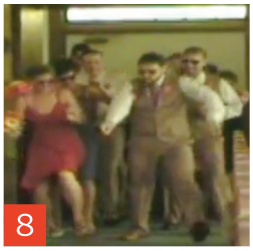
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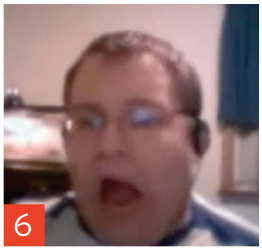
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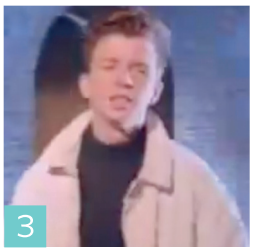
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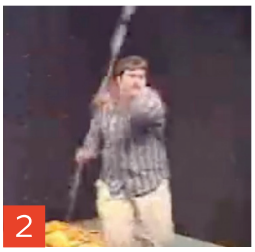
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REQUIEM FOR A MEME: A DECADE OF ONLINE IN-JOKES

BY MICHAEL SABA

Richard Dawkins minted the term "meme" to explain the movement of information—as genes are to biology, memes are to culture. And though the word has some true-blue egghead roots as a term thrown around by evolutionary biologists, the Internet has bastardized it into a shorthand for all things viral. Throughout the aughts, we've seen an onslaught of viral media: indie bands on treadmills, prairie dogs turning heads, and LEEROY JENKINS. A list of the best of these memes reads like a super-abridged history of Internet culture, a rap sheet full of LOLs and WTFs.

10 ALL YOUR BASE ARE BELONG TO US (2001)

"Somebody set up us the bomb." Thus began the grammatically indecipherable English translation of the 1991 Sega Genesis game *Zero Wing* and the venerable viral video that parodied it. Its crude Photoshopping of antagonist CATS onto the cover of *Time* proved eerily prescient: The meme has filtered down to cable news, a YouTube 404 page, and the lexicons of snarky IT professionals everywhere.

9 DAVID AFTER DENTIST (2009)

This YouTube video of a kid zonked-out on painkillers after a visit to the dentist proved that questionable parenting decisions and drug use by a minor *can* be funny. And young David's plea of "Is this real life?" packed an unlikely existential punch.

8 JK WEDDING ENTRANCE DANCE (2009)

An understated "Jill and Kevin's Big Day" title card precedes this Chris Brown-fueled wedding-processional dance party. It's easily the coolest nuptial ceremony since Slash stormed out of the church in the "November Rain" video and ripped a mournful guitar solo. And the parody "JK Divorce Entrance Dance" video doubled down on the choreography—though not the believability.

7 CHOCOLATE RAIN (2007)

Tay Zonday's monotonic singing and cheesy synth loop went viral almost instantly. The cryptic tagline "**I move away from the mic to breathe in" (cribbed from the video's subtitles) made it seem sillier than it really was—Zonday's song actually offered some sincere social commentary.

6 NUMA NUMA (2004)

Gary Brolsma decided it would be a good idea to record himself performing an over-earnest, choreographed lip-synch to the Moldovan band O-Zone's "Dragostea din tei" and post it to Newgrounds.com. The Internet decided it was hilarious. At long last, Euro-pop-obsessed computer geeks and Belle and Sebastian bedroom dancers had found common ground.

5 CHUCK NORRIS FACTS (2005)

Conan O'Brien's "*Walker, Texas Ranger* lever" is thought to be the inspiration for this much-flogged dead horse, which is now only funny in a way that escapes the average person who recites Chuck Norris facts. And last year Norris levied his cyberfame as Mike Huckabee's spokesman. Yikes.

4 I CAN HAS CHEEZBURGER? (2007)

The impetus of the infamous LOLcat craze, this picture of an excited-looking, typo-prone feline went on to spawn countless imitators. It can now be seen clogging your inbox, courtesy of a forward from your grandmother.

3 RICKROLL (2008)

You might think the link you're clicking is taking you somewhere pertinent, but no: It's the video of Rick Astley's campy blue-eyed soul mega-hit "Never Gonna Give You Up." Astley turned the tables on all of us by appearing in the 2008 Macy's Thanksgivings Day parade, rickrolling an audience of millions in one fell swoop.

2 *STAR WARS* KID (2002)

A Canadian high schooler was so inspired by *Star Wars* that he videotaped himself swinging a golf ball retriever like Darth Maul. But even a Jedi has his limits—after the clip became the most viewed viral video of all time, the kid sued four of his schoolmates for harassment.

1 LAZY SUNDAY (2005)

The video that put both YouTube and Andy Samberg on the map. This *SNL* digital short of Chris Parnell and Samberg rapping about cupcakes and Narnia was viewed more than 5 million times before NBC yanked it—like just about every other damn *SNL* skit someone uploads to YouTube.

> "Nothing has done more to make us dumber or meaner than the anonymity of the Internet."
>
> **AARON SORKIN,** 2008

TV: BEST of the DECADE

10 *Mad Men*

AMC (2007-PRESENT)

Unless you worked on Madison Avenue in the early 1960s, AMC's first foray into original drama has all the otherworldliness of a foreign film. It's easy to covet a time when working in an office meant sharp suits, free-flowing liquor and nary a computer screen or Blackberry to tie you down. It's also easy to feel superior to the characters' rampant racism and misogyny. But there's something all too familiar at the heart of *Mad Men*—the failings of the powerful and petty never go out of style. **JOSH JACKSON**

8 *Battlestar Galactica*

SYFY (2003-2009)

Ronald D. Moore turned a cheesy '70s show into a gritty, unflinching look at what it means to be human, and ended up with one of the best sci-fi series of all time. With the crew of Galactica encountering no aliens during its exodus, the show was free to pit religion against science, freedom against security and family against conscience—tensions with no easy answers. It's an epic tale with few villains and fewer heroes—just flawed people fighting for survival. JJ

7 *Lost* ABC (2004-PRESENT)

When J.J. Abrams first marooned his plane-crash survivors on a remote island, no one realized the show's name was a double entendre: It took crowd-sourced blogs to make sense of all the hidden clues, relevant connections, time shifts and intertwined storylines, and each season has given us far more questions than answers. But there's something refreshing about a network TV show that trusts the mental rigor of its audience instead of dumbing everything down to the lowest common denominator. Sometimes it's good to be a little lost. JJ

9 *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

THE WB/UPN (1997-2003)

Buffy the Vampire Slayer had it all: Romance, drama, tragedy, suspense. The show took the teen-soap formula and elevated it to an art. It was a unique combination of tragic romance, apocalyptic fantasy and the clincher—emotional realism. It also featured the most serious and realistic depiction of human loss ever witnessed on the small screen (in "The Body," dealing with the death of Buffy's mom by natural causes).

Humor? The writers understood the campy sheen that must accompany any show named *Buffy*. They also knew how to use snappy dialogue and uncomfortable situations to full effect.

Complex characters? You'd be hard pressed to find another program that had the same range and consistency of character development. Everyone matured (or devolved) at his or her own realistic rate. As some feminist writers have argued, TV had never before seen the complexity of relationships among women that you saw with the likes of Buffy, Willow, Joyce and Dawn.

Plot? The writers employed elaborate multi-episode, multi-season story arcs. People and events of the past always had a way of popping back up, the way they do in real life.

Philosophy? Series creator Joss Whedon was all about the "meta"—the ideas and story behind the story. Each season had a driving concept, and he explored an astonishingly wide range of topics. Quick asides referencing Sartre or Aquinas were as at home as the pop-culture references. The show spawned an active academic community around it (see "Buffy studies" at Wikipedia.org). Whedon wanted his heroine to be iconic. As he put it, "I wanted people to embrace it in a way that exists beyond, 'Oh, that was a wonderful show about lawyers; let's have dinner.'" He succeeded, creating a WB/UPN show that bears closer resemblance to the works of Dostoevsky and Kafka than *90210* or *Dawson's Creek*. **TIM REGAN-PORTER**

MOST EVOCATIVE USE OF MUSIC IN A COMMERCIAL

Nick Drake's "Pink Moon," which turned a 2000 Volkswagen ad into a wistful work of art.

TV

"I want to be done playing this lady Nov. 5. So, if anyone can help me be done playing this lady Nov. 5, that would be good for me."

TINA FEY ON SARAH PALIN, 2008

FAUX NEWS *is* GOOD NEWS

BY STEVE LABATE

Over the last decade, the newspaper industry has buckled. Three of network TV's longest-running and most trusted news anchors (Tom Brokaw, Peter Jennings and Dan Rather) have disappeared from the airwaves. And cable news has become consumed by talking heads paid to eternally bicker as if trapped in some earthbound Purgatory, a place where opinion and hearsay are subtly suggested to be fact, and where it's *policy* to cut away from coverage of the day's most important issues to follow a live car chase on the L.A. freeway. In this climate, comedic news shows—which began as a mild diversion, banking on the popularity of *Saturday Night Live*'s "Weekend Update"—have become an essential part of our national dialogue. These days, fake news often seems more accurate and influential than *actual* news. Tina Fey's impersonation of Sarah Palin on *SNL*, for example, did more to harpoon her candidacy than any mainstream news story. Satirical powerhouses like *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, *Chocolate News* and *Onion TV* draw their power from William Faulkner's idea that the best fiction is truer than any journalism. In a culture where Stephen Colbert delivers the keynote address at the White House Correspondents Dinner, and where a *Time* magazine poll reveals that Jon Stewart is "America's Most Trusted Newscaster"—with 44 percent of the vote to runner-up NBC anchor Brian Williams' 29 percent—it's tough to argue to the contrary.

The Wire

6 *The Sopranos*

HBO (1999-2007)

For eight years, James Gandolfini crawled deep inside the complexities of Tony Soprano—loving father, son and husband, goodhearted friend, master of sardonic one-liners ("How do you vandalize a pool?"), troubled psych patient, serial adulterer, mob boss and brutal, remorseless killer—inspiring as much dumbfounded loathing and shuddering sympathy as any character in TV history. Murderers aren't one-dimensional; they have feelings, aspirations, justifications, families. *The Sopranos* brilliantly and believably explored this dynamic, turning the crime-drama on its head and taking dysfunction to the extreme in the process. As unfathomable as their world was, the characters of this tragic, beautifully arcing modern epic were so real that they became like family to us, too. **STEVE LABATE**

5 *The Office*

BBC (2001-2003); NBC (2005-PRESENT)

Ricky Gervais' immortal Britcom deserves full marks for establishing this comedy franchise that killed the laugh track and introduced us to a hilarious bunch of paper-pushing mopes. Defying expectations that it would pale in comparison, NBC's *Office* has become an institution unto itself. At its best, the American version is just as awkward as its predecessor, while showing a lot more heart than the gang could muster in sooty old England. **NICK MARINO**

4 *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*

COMEDY CENTRAL (1996-PRESENT)

Amidst the madness and absurdity of the post-9/11 world, as the old-standby TV-news anchors retired or passed away, young America was looking for its new Cronkite, Rather, Jennings or Brokaw. Into this void, improbably, stepped comedian Jon Stewart and his band of brilliantly deadpan correspondents. While *The Daily Show* never really claimed to be more than a satirical faux-news show, it is so much more, offering the smartest, most unflinching social commentary on television. **SL**

3 *The West Wing*

NBC (1999-2006)

Television's quintessential political drama began in the Clinton era, soldiered on through Bush and 9/11, and ended in the earliest days of the Age of Obama. Weirdly, the show's political climate was more stable than reality itself. And maybe that was its appeal. *The West Wing* showed us government not as it was, but as it *could* be—a White House run by quippy, tireless, big-hearted public servants who believed in governing with decency. President Josiah Bartlet would give any of his real-life counterparts a run for their money. **NM**

2 *The Wire*

HBO (2002-2008)

Series mastermind David Simon conceived *The Wire* as a modern Greek tragedy, a morality play set in a drug-infested urban war zone where conventional good guys and bad guys barely exist. Everyone is conflicted and compromised. We didn't need *The Wire* to remind us that "the system"—the criminal justice system, the political system, the education system—is broken. But no other cultural enterprise (and certainly no television show) has shown us precisely *how* the infrastructure has collapsed, forcing us to consider the impossible decisions required for repair. Amidst the rubble of a failed city, Simon created an engrossing human drama about the eternal struggle between aspiration and desperation, ambition and resignation—in other words, the fight for the American Dream. **NM**

Arrested Development

FOX (2003-2006)

Mitch Hurwitz' sitcom about a "wealthy family who lost everything and the one son who had no choice but to keep them all together" debuted six weeks after *Two and a Half Men*, but never gathered the audience to keep the show alive. Still, Hurwitz packed a whole lot of awesome into three short seasons. How much awesome? Well, there was the chicken dance, for starters. And Franklin's "It's Not Easy Being White." There was Ron Howard's spot-on narration, and Tobias Funke's Blue Man ambitions. There was Mrs. Featherbottom and Charlize Theron as Rita, Michael Bluth's mentally challenged love interest.

Not since *Seinfeld* has a comic storyline been so perfectly constructed, with every loose thread tying so perfectly into the next act: The Oedipal Buster spiting his mother Lucille by dating her friend Lucille, and eventually losing his hand to a hungry loose seal; George Michael crushing on his cousin only to have the house cave in when they finally kiss; the Save Our Bluths campaign trying to simultaneously rescue the family and rescue the show from cancellation.

Arrested Development took self-referencing postmodernism to an absurdist extreme, jumping shark after shark, but that was the point. They even brought on the original shark-jumper—Henry Winkler—as the family lawyer. And when he was replaced, naturally, it was by Scott Baio. Each of the Bluth family members was among the best characters on television, and Jason Bateman played a brilliant straight man to them all.

The show was canned three years ago. Meanwhile, *Two and a Half Men* is still trotting out new episodes. What the hell is wrong with you, America? **JJ**

PASTE READERS' POLL

1 *Arrested Development*
2 *The Office*
3 *Lost*
4 *Firefly*
5 *30 Rock*
6 *Freaks and Geeks* (pictured)
7 *Scrubs*
8 *Mad Men*
9 *The Daily Show*
10 *The West Wing*

"You can't get un-famous. You can get infamous, but you can't get un-famous. So I got scared. I'm not gonna lie to y'all. I was scared to death."

DAVE CHAPPELLE EXPLAINING HIS ABRUPT SHOWBIZ EXODUS, 2006,

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GAME

BEST of the DECADE

10 *Guitar Hero III: Legends of Rock*

DEVELOPER: NEVERSOFT // PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION (2007)

When legendary guitarist Slash traded his leather jacket and top hat for a motion-capture suit and let the developers at Neversoft render him in the third installment of the *Guitar Hero* franchise, the rhythm genre reached a new plateau of credibility. The visuals were explosive, crisp and cartoonishly endearing. With a finale involving a guitar duel with the cloven-footed Prince of Darkness to a metal rendition of "Devil Went Down to Georgia," the game had us at hell(o). **JASON KILLINGSWORTH**

9 *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*

DEVELOPER: ROCKSTAR NORTH // PUBLISHER: ROCKSTAR GAMES (2004)

With its L.A.-inspired blend of hand grenades, homies and vehicular homicide, *GTA: San Andreas* wasn't so much a sequel as the next evolutionary step in Rockstar's legendary series. Building upon the features of its predecessors, *San Andreas* offered polished gameplay, a sprawling open-world environment and in-depth character customization. The end result was a stylish sandbox shooter that sold more than 21 million copies and set the bar for one of the most innovative franchises in gaming history. **ADAM VOLK**

8 *Call of Duty 4: Modern Warfare*

DEVELOPER: INFINITY WARD // PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION (2007)

Until this mega-blockbuster, first-person shooters aiming for realism tended to focus on the events of World War II. And why not? Shooting at Nazis seemed to pose a less thorny moral dilemma than recreating a battle from, say, the Vietnam War. But by staging its conflict in a Middle Eastern locale, *Call of Duty 4* brought a harrowingly familiar intensity to its campaign. Moral issues aside, it's not every day you get to narrowly avert a worldwide nuclear holocaust. **JK**

7 *Half-Life 2*

DEVELOPER: VALVE // PUBLISHER: VALVE/EA GAMES (2004)

When Valve released *Half-Life 2* in 2004, the studio broke new ground in computer animation, artificial intelligence, audio design and narrative immersion. But possibly the series' most revolutionary breakthrough was protagonist Gordon Freeman, a research scientist with thick, plastic-rimmed glasses—finally, a videogame character that was both geeky *and* badass. Still hailed as one of the great PC games of all time, its arrival on current-generation consoles merely cemented its mighty legacy. **JK**

MOST GRUESOME VIDEOGAME WEAPON

For sheer devastation, nothing approaches the Lancer Assault Rifle from the *Gears of War* franchise, a chainsaw bayonet that soldiers can rev up to slice through close-range aliens—like a table saw through warm butter.

6 *Halo: Combat Evolved*

DEVELOPER: BUNGIE STUDIOS // PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT GAME STUDIOS (2001)

If you're a male between the ages of eight and 88, chances are you spent more than a few sleepless, trash-talk-filled nights playing *Halo* with friends when it first arrived on the original Xbox. The game's faceless hero Master Chief saved humankind, and it's entirely possible he also saved Bill Gates' gaming console in the process. If *Halo* doesn't seem remarkable today, it's only because the game's perfectly balanced multiplayer experience has been so relentlessly copied by every other shooter to follow in its wake. **JK**

Halo: Combat Evolved

S

"War. War never changes."

FALLOUT 3, 2008

5 *Resident Evil 4*

DEVELOPER: CAPCOM // PUBLISHER: CAPCOM (2005)

Resident Evil 4 knows what scares you: The skittering of insect legs across damp stone, the ripple of something massive slithering through brackish water, the isolation of finding yourself alone in a strange land, the suffocating tension of being one step from death in any direction. Dying is an inevitable result of failure in most games, but *Resident Evil 4* makes you feel it by walking you along the razor's edge, overwhelming you with threats. Unlike past *Resident Evil* games, ammo isn't a problem; target selection is. Constantly surrounded, you find yourself losing ground with every passing second. One setpiece after another is handled with expert pacing and flawless design. *Resident Evil 4* taps directly into your lizard brain, that primal space in the mind that's the source of all human fear—and pleasure, too. **MITCH KRPATA**

4 *Shadow of the Colossus*

DEVELOPER: SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT // PUBLISHER: SONY COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT (2005)

Shadow of the Colossus weaves its own strange, fascinating mythology. A lone warrior on horseback arrives at an ancient temple with a body wrapped in a cloak; after hoisting his burden up on the stone alter, our hero, Wander, removes the cloak to reveal a lovely maiden, serene in death. A booming voice tells Wander he can return the soul to her lifeless body by defeating 16 fearsome colossi scattered around the land. Each colossus on your quest inspires awe, towering high above your head, sending earthquakes through the ground with each lumbering footstep. Few games in history can claim such taut atmosphere and dramatic scale. **JK**

3 *Fallout 3*

DEVELOPER: BETHESDA GAME STUDIOS // PUBLISHER: BETHESDA GAME SOFTWARE (2008)

A game with brilliant writing, astonishing art direction and a healthy dose of family drama, *Fallout 3*'s indelible moment arrives when you stumble out of Vault 101 for the first time and are blinded by sunlight. It takes a good three or four seconds before your pupils contract enough to take in the devastated wasteland stretching out for you to explore. Each hill you traverse reveals new adventures and quests to undertake. **JK**

Shadow of the Colossus

2 *Bioshock*

DEVELOPERS: 2K BOSTON/2K AUSTRALIA // PUBLISHER: 2K GAMES (2007)

Ken Levine's chilling narrative about a dystopian underwater city called Rapture is one of interactive media's crowning achievements, proving that videogames can stretch beyond mere entertainment and raise provocative moral and sociological questions. Completely immersive, vividly imagined and with a third-act plot twist to rival *The Sixth Sense*, it's the complete package. **JK**

1 *Portal*

DEVELOPER: VALVE // PUBLISHER: VALVE (2007)

Ah, *Portal*: You arrived just when we'd forgotten the wallop of a fresh, perfectly executed idea. From start to finish, you lasted only a few hours, but the impression left a mark. We laughed ourselves hoarse. We died (many times). We fell in love with a weighted companion cube. For all that, and so much more—thanks. **JK**

Portal

BOOK

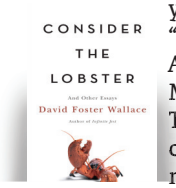
BEST *of the* DECADE

> "Although some of the facts have been questioned, the underlying message of redemption in James Frey's memoir still resonates with me, and I know that it resonates with millions of other people who have read this book."
>
> **OPRAH WINFREY,** 2006

10 David Foster Wallace

Consider The Lobster And Other Essays

LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY (2005)



Wallace's final collection keeps breaking your heart, and not just when you're reading "How Tracy Austin Broke My Heart." That mind, containing multitudes. That matchless maximalism, literally breathtaking. He hooks us with nouns, the personsplacesthings of contemporary culture—talk-show hosts, state fairs, cruise ships. Then he captures us with verbs. Forget the lobster. Wallace shows us *considering*. He is all action and propulsion, a mind at work, more alive than we will ever be. **ANNE TRUBEK**

9 Jonathan Safran Foer

Everything Is Illuminated

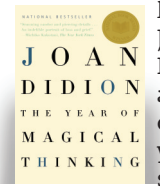
HARPER PERENNIAL (2002)

We shared it with our loved ones, pressing it into their hands like a locket. This astonishing story of self-discovery—of loss and hope and faith and sacrifice—is the story of every immigrant, every wanderer and sad romantic. It is fiction and fable. It is ancient and modern. It is guileless. It reminds us who we were and where we came from, and it shows us how to love for all time. **NICK MARINO**

8 Joan Didion

The Year of Magical Thinking

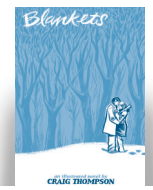
KNOPF (2005)



Carving out a unique place in the lexicon of memoir, Didion documents her husband John Gregory Dunne's death and her state of mind in the year after. The sequence of searingly painful scenes is articulated with such clarity that they have the opposite effect of what we expect: Rather than depress, the book liberates and inspires. In an almost unprecedented literary voice, Didion combines great depth of feeling with a journalist's cool detachment. The reader comes away feeling honored at having been included. **ROSANNE CASH**

7 Craig Thompson

Blankets **TOP SHELF PRODUCTIONS (2003)**



Blankets is Craig Thompson's lyrical bildungsroman told in graphic-novel form. Maligned and mistreated by his religious family and community, a self-loathing Thompson grapples with faith and love only to discover that loss is everywhere. The expert drawings and absorbing narrative depict the inherent sadness in growing up, but the real resonance is found in the marriage of text and image. **AMANDA STERN**

PASTE READERS' POLL

1. ***Everything is Illuminated*** Jonathan Safran Foer
2. ***Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*** Jonathan Safran Foer
3. **A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius** Dave Eggers
4. ***The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay*** Michael Chabon
5. ***The Road*** Cormac McCarthy
6. ***Middlesex*** Jeffrey Eugenides
7. ***The Time Traveler's Wife*** Audrey Niffenegger
8. ***Life of Pi*** Yann Martel
9. ***Me Talk Pretty One Day*** David Sedaris
10. ***The Corrections*** Jonathan Franzen

SENTENCE OF THE DECADE

"There is shit in the meat."
Eric Schlosser,
Fast Food Nation

5 Jeffrey Eugenides

Middlesex PICADOR (2002)

In many ways, *Middlesex* resembles Eugenides' 1993 debut, *The Virgin Suicides*: Both novels are heady with self-discovery, closely kept secrets and fumbling sexuality, all etched in the author's gorgeous, quivering prose. But *Middlesex* mines a deeper, richer field. The book tills three generations of a family's evolution from Greek farmers to Detroit suburbanites, ultimately grappling with the unimaginable burden laid by history on the body of Calliope Stephanides. It's a masterpiece—beautiful, brave and devastating.

RACHAEL MADDUX

4 Marilynne Robinson ***Gilead***

FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX (2004)

In this Pulitzer-winning novel, dying 76-year-old Reverend John Ames pens an explanatory letter assessing his checkered lineage for his six-year-old son. Although the missive is chockfull of Ames' theological contentions and his own shortcomings, it never once dips into that loathsome territory of storytelling as sermon. Instead, his commentary is quietly profound. It creates an aching hope that we, too, may be so enlightened when our time comes to pass from this world. ELISSA ELLIOTT

3 Cormac McCarthy

The Road KNOPF (2006)

Don't believe *The Road* is great because of its meditations on the human condition. It ain't. *The Road* is an adventure book. That's why it's great. A father and son travel an American wasteland, avoiding bands of cannibals. Sound like fun? Hell yeah. McCarthy spares the ponderous "wisdom" that can sometimes make his work a slog. Father and son are hunted. Starving. Probably doomed. Father despairs. Son has faith. Both are right. That's beyond wisdom—that's eternal truth. VICTOR LAVALLE

2 Dave Eggers

A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius

SIMON & SCHUSTER (2000)

We understand any mixed emotions about this pick. Eggers himself has moved on from this book's hyperactive po-mo voice, and progressed to a more mature style—shouldn't we move on, too? Doesn't this debut memoir, published at the dawn of the century, seem dated? No. Please resist the reflex to knock *A Heartbreaking Work* as outré. Recall instead how hilarious, smart, vibrantly alive and simply fun this book was to read. And read it again.

THOMAS MULLEN

6 Markus Zusak

The Book Thief

KNOPF (2005)

By some unfathomable marketing logic, publisher Knopf labeled Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* as young-adult fiction. Formerly called "juveniles," YA books typically lack the swearing, sex and inscrutability of "adult" literature, and publishers can sell them to schools by the score without fear of parental backlash. Despite its reductionist label, *The Book Thief* transcends age and most other categories and has found its footing among adults. Since its publication in '05, this remarkable, deeply emotional Holocaust tale—narrated by Death and focused on the maturation of a grieving girl named Liesel—has stayed on bestseller lists around the world. Orphaned by the loss of her Communist parents and traumatized by the death of her brother, Liesel is adopted by an Aryan family as the Nazis take power. She learns to read after stealing three books, and the words she comes to love resuscitate her heart. Then she meets Max, the Jew her new family hides in the basement at their collective peril. Critics always search for books that will be read long after we are gone, and *The Book Thief* is without question one of these immortal works. Destined to join Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Anne Frank's diary in the rarified reaches of category-transcending triumphs, Zusak's masterpiece belongs in the highest ranks of serious literary achievement. I wept when I finished it, partly out of its passionate, fervent humanity, and partly because I wanted it to go on forever. DAVID LANGNESS

Michael Chabon

The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay

RANDOM HOUSE (2000)

Ever since my eyes lingered over the concluding sentence of Michael Chabon's magnum opus and I pressed the book shut with a gale-force sigh of *yes indeed*, I have owed *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* this little fan letter. To simply recount *Kavalier & Clay*'s narrative—a pair of cousins reunite in 1939 in New York City, combine their artistic gifts and ultimately help usher in the Golden Age of Comics—misses the point. Plenty of authors can unspool a fascinating yarn. What sets this particular novel apart is the alchemical explosion triggered by the convergence of Chabon's 200-proof delight in the comic-book artform with the writing craft and conscientious research he invests in every single one of his novels. What is the comic-book formula if not an exaggerated Technicolor recasting of the American ideal? A world of perfect moral clarity where Good and Evil wear bold, legibly written nametags? A world in which sheer will and determination can propel a man to skyscraper-leaping heights? Our heroes, a pair of mere mortals, spackle over their crippling insecurities by writing and drawing men of steel. Chabon paints the superhuman fantasy with such gleeful strokes that you recoil when faced with the crushing reality that would-be Clark Kents like Josef Kavalier and Sam Clay—like you and me—have hearts of kryptonite.

JASON KILLINGSWORTH

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THE PASTE RECKONING

LYLE LOVETT → 59

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OUT OF THE SHADOWS

Longtime sideman takes the lead with first solo album

BY STEPHEN M. DEUSNER

DAVE RAWLINGS MACHINE

A Friend of a Friend ACONY

It's hard to believe *A Friend of a Friend* is David Rawlings' first album under his own name. For more than 12 years, the Nashville-based musician has toured, written and recorded with Gillian Welch, exploring the well-worn byways of country, bluegrass and stringband music while making the old-timey sound new. As a hired gun, he's played sideman to artists following in Welch's wake or creating their own: Sara Watkins, Ryan Adams, Bright Eyes, Guy Clark, Mark Knopfler and Jay Farrar, among others. So his debut as Dave Rawlings Machine is either a case of him stepping up, or everyone else stepping back. Welch herself appears on almost all of these songs, either singing harmony or playing guitar, as do several other musician friends. But Rawlings takes the lead on every track, as a singer and picker.

For nine songs over 40 minutes, Rawlings proves fascinating company—a good man to share a front porch with. As a performer, he makes good use of his distinct, reedy tenor (imagine a twangier Loudon Wainwright). And he has a spry, jumpy guitar style that lends his arrangements some bounce. As a producer, he keeps things loose and lively, mixing covers with originals. *A Friend of a Friend* plays like a rough, intimate live album instead of a polished studio affair.

The record captures Rawlings in his natural setting, where haste reads as spontaneity and the exposed seams are part of the appeal. The segue from Bright Eyes' "Method Acting" into Neil Young's "Cortez the Killer" sounds like a juxtaposition worked out on small stages before countless audiences, and while Rawlings mutes Conor Oberst's default disgust, his largely acoustic rendering emphasizes Young's lyrics as much as his guitar parts, making for a fresh reading of an oft-covered song.

"Method Acting" is one of several semi-covers on *A Friend of a Friend*, each a previous collaboration. "To Be Young (Is to Be Sad, Is to Be High)"—from Ryan Adams' 2000 solo debut *Heartbreaker* (on which Rawlings played heavily)—gets a rambunctious treatment that adds a scratchy fiddle courtesy of Old Crow Medicine Show's Ketch Secor. Like Adams' version, this one swings with a palpable sense of youthful abandon that drives the song even more than the percussive strumming. Rawlings follows it with the tenderly thoughtful "I Hear Them All," a co-write from OCMS' 2006 album *Big Iron World*, which he produced. Taking it out of its original stringband setting, Rawlings accompanies himself on acoustic guitar and lets the song breathe, subtly alluding to folk activists like Pete Seeger and Phil Ochs.

Rawlings is a clever raconteur with a deep knowledge of country history and a tendency to let his songs ramble. Each track here sounds like it has a long story behind it. The album covers a wide swath of traditional American music: "Sweet Tooth" is an endearing Welch duet that draws from Appalachian folk as it stretches its metaphor like saltwater taffy, and "How's About You" is an old Nashville strut that recalls Hank Williams. Rawlings instills a charming ragtime boisterousness into Jesse Fuller's "Monkey and the Engineer," ignoring the Grateful Dead's popular version and going back to the original for inspiration. And opener "Ruby" sounds like California country rock circa Gram Parsons.

Such diversity is instructive—and, rather than delivering a dry seminar on Americana, Rawlings keeps things lively and raucous thanks to energetic performances and a light touch on the production. Details and nuances emerge over repeated listens, revealing the care that went into the recording. The xylophone on "Sweet Tooth" re-creates bass rhythms that might otherwise be played on a jug, adding an unexpected but appropriate jazz vibe. "Ruby" slyly appropriates the melody from "Oh Girl," a hit in 1972 for Chicago group The Chi-Lites—and, whether or not that allusion is intentional, the soul-to-country translation casts Rawlings and Welch's harmonies in a new light. Both "Ruby" and closing track "Bells of Harlem" feature sensitive string arrangements by famed composer Jimmie Haskell (you may know him from Simon & Garfunkel's "Bridge Over Troubled Water" and Bobbie Gentry's "Ode to Billie Joe"). Haskell gives the songs an old Nashville grandeur, keying up the drama without overpowering Rawlings' performance. "Bells of Harlem" winds down with a few simple, graceful chords that end the album on a lovely benedictory note.

> Reviving co-written tracks alongside so many Welch collaborations gives *A Friend of a Friend* a retrospective flair, as if Rawlings is fashioning his own greatest hits.

Reviving the co-written tracks alongside so many Welch collaborations gives *A Friend of a Friend* a retrospective flair, as if Rawlings is fashioning his own greatest hits. The restless vibe to this ramshackle collection suggests Rawlings' greatest trait is his wanderlust. It's allowed him to work closely with a range of different artists in the past, and it makes *A Friend of a Friend* a spirited affair. He's already been everywhere, but this debut suggests Rawlings is really going places.

8.6

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Photo by Mark Seliger

ONLINE Read an interview with Dave Rawlings at PasteMagazine.com/November09.

SEASON FOR SORROW

Duo's heartfelt sophomore album comes up short

BY JASON KILLINGSWORTH

THE SWELL SEASON

Strict Joy ANTI-

Irish troubador Glen Hansard had achieved moderate success with his band The Frames before starring in John Carney's unlikely indie blockbuster *Once*, for which he co-wrote the gold-selling soundtrack with his co-star, a Czech sweetheart named Markéta Irglová. They called themselves The Swell Season.

And then came the inevitable whispers rippling through the crowds that watched *Once* (and, later, the duo's performance of "Falling Slowly" on the 2008 Academy Awards): "They're such a cute couple—did you know they're together?"

At least, they *were* together. The Swell Season's sophomore album, *Strict Joy*, documents the untethering of Hansard and Irglová's romantic tie.

The early songs that comprised the *Once* soundtrack fit the narrative of Hansard and Irglová's characters in Carney's film—a couple of exceptionally talented musicians who were still getting used to playing together when they entered the recording studio. Those tracks had a stripped-down urgency that felt like someone pulling a band together on short notice, depending on a bit of luck and a whole lot of chemistry.

From the slinky guitar riff and droning horn charts that kick off *Strict Joy* opener "Low Rising," it's immediately obvious the band's sound has matured dramatically. The album takes a calculated risk, sacrificing emotional immediacy for a polished, carefully stitched-together instrumental palette. The record was co-produced by Hansard and Peter Katis (The National, Interpol), and recorded primarily at Katis' Tarquin Studios in Connecticut. The album is packed with exquisite sonic details. The gorgeous ballad "In These Arms" showcases sparkling piano accents and tremulous violin notes whining in the background. Hansard's feathery guitar strum and expressive voice sound warm enough to wrap you up for a blissful mid-winter nap.

On the other end of the emotional spectrum, "Feeling the Pull" recalls the clangorous, percussive glee of the *Once* tune "When Your Mind's Made Up," though this time Hansard's voice never quite catches fire. Everything just feels a bit more tame and controlled on *Strict Joy*. Given the breakup that informed this song cycle, Hansard's voice seems likely to snap the leash and roar with abandon. Instead, the lion is whimpering at the thorn wedged in his paw.

While Irglová is formidable as a musician and harmonizer, her efforts on *Strict Joy* wilt in the glow of Hansard's contributions. An opening string of four overpowering Hansard-penned tunes collides abruptly with the nylon-string bossa-nova shuffle of "Fantasy Man," on which Irglová sings of two lovers who "danced on both edges of the knife." Her paper-thin voice struggles to command attention in isolation, wandering in search of an inspired melody it never finds. Even Colm Mac Con Iomaire's gorgeous violin can't salvage the resulting mess. Irglová's other solo turn, "I Have Loved You Wrong," plods along with such wrenching lethargy that it gathers dust.

> The album takes a calculated risk, sacrificing emotional immediacy for a polished, carefully stitched-together palette.

Perhaps the band's relentless touring or relational stress is to blame, but the majority of these songs have a nagging scarcity of compelling musical ideas. "Love That Conquers," for instance, drives its rolling acoustic-guitar figure into the ground with over-repetition, faking like it's about to end at the 3:08 mark, only to pick back up and slow-jam for another 40 tedious seconds before finally petering out.

The Swell Season's principal members are wildly talented, with the potential for real artistic longevity—and at least four songs here will eventually glitter on a best-of compilation. Sadly, this record might be the perfect metaphor for a romantic partnership, ill-fated or otherwise. Like any meaningful human relationship, *Strict Joy* is raw, beautiful, messy, intimate, occasionally thrilling and, just as often, categorically mundane.

6.3

Photo by Lyle Owerko

JASON KILLINGSWORTH IS *PASTE*'S VIDEO GAMES EDITOR AND FORMER DEPUTY EDITOR.

ONLINE Read an interview with Glen Hansard at PasteMagazine.com/November09.

DEVENDRA BANHART

What Will We Be

REPRISE

Captain of the New, Weird America seems slightly less strange on major-label debut

"Please destroy me!" pleads freakfolk flagbearer Devendra Banhart on "First Song for B," one of the many contemplative yet insistent acoustic portraits that dot his sixth full-length, *What Will We Be*. Later, he proclaims, "I'm never goin' back!" While Banhart is likely essaying a relationship caught between pillar and post, he could just as easily be ruminating on his place in the musical world circa 2009. Having emerged as one of the weird-beard genre's foremost exponents (his middle name *is* Obi, after all, as in the *Star Wars* character), his Reprise debut slowly reveals itself as a more straightforward affair. Featuring his touring band of the past few years (which includes producer Noah Georgeson on guitar and various members of Priestbird, The Pleased and Little Joy), Banhart's latest was recorded in the same NorCal location that produced Paul Kantner and Grace Slick's 1971 family album, *Sunfighter*. (Banhart is a classicist in the studio sense, having also recorded in The Band's digs and Neil Young's *Goldrush*-era Topanga Canyon hideout.) What once made Banhart such a strange bird—roaming from jazz to folk to indie pop, often within a single song, as on the impossibly catchy "Chin Chin & Muck Muck"—now seems almost mainstream, as if the rest of the pop world has not only caught up with him, but left him in its dust. "The neighbors'll hear you!" Banhart playfully insists at one juncture—perhaps that was the whole point. **COREY DUBROWA** **6.8**

NORAH JONES

The Fall

BLUE NOTE

Unexpected dance grooves from jazzy folk star

As a jazz-adoring youngster, Norah Jones initially made her mark as a performer, her best-known songs written by others. Jones has since grown up as a songwriter on the biggest of stages, a challenge she's tackled by turning inward, working with a set of regular bandmates and daring to whisper her increasingly pointed lines when others might over-emote. On *The Fall*, Jones is clearly comfortable with where she's arrived, and is ready to throw open the doors for a party—one that boasts guests such as Ryan Adams, Okkervil River's Will Sheff and session aces Marc Ribot and Joey Waronker. Guitars, prominent basslines and slinky late-night grooves dominate the proceedings. Album centerpiece "It's Gonna Be" serves as the perfect highlight, with Jones' unmistakable voice draped in slapback echo and underscored by a tom-tom heavy beat—all to deliver some stinging social commentary. **REID DAVIS** **7.6**

MILES BENJAMIN ANTHONY ROBINSON

Summer of Fear

SADDLE CREEK

Sophomore record impresses with dark humor, gorgeous sounds

In case you were wondering, Miles Benjamin Anthony Robinson is not a new supergroup featuring trance composer Robert Miles, OutKast's Andre Benjamin, Van Halen bassist Michael Anthony and Black Crowes frontman Chris Robinson. No, it's just one man—with names in proportion to his vast talent. Robinson's self-titled 2008 debut was loaded with the sighing surrender of hopeless alcoholic/junkie/murder ballads like "Buriedfed" and "The Debtor," often featuring dreamy, subtly psychedelic production that sounded like Beatles engineer Geoff Emerick had dropped by every so often to twist a few knobs. For the follow-up (produced by TV on the Radio's Kyp Malone with help from Chris Taylor and Chris Bear of Grizzly Bear), Robinson takes a slightly pared back approach—a sonic fusion of his first album and the classic Saddle Creek sound—that emphasizes his sardonic lyrics. A less jittery Isaac Brock for a new generation, the Oregon-born, Brooklyn-based singer/songwriter takes us on a mumbly but beautifully evocative tour of moral lapses, temporary ecstasy, agony, regret, acceptance, quiet resignation, and finally something akin to wisdom—though it's never quite enough. With Robinson's late-twentysomething gallows humor, the next song-inspiring slip-up is always right around the corner, as if this album's mantra is, "Learn to enjoy pain! It's God's gift to artists." **STEVE LABATE** **7.8**

LYLE LOVETT

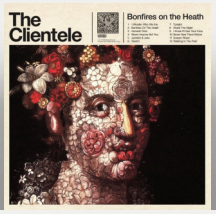
Natural Forces

LOST HIGHWAY

Tall-haired Texan delivers his best album in more than a decade

Lyle Lovett is the ultimate AAA artist in a ten-gallon hat: Not quite country, not exactly blues, and definitely not jazz (though he's sympathetic to the tradition), Lovett has coupled his witty wordplay with an eclectic grab bag of musical adornment throughout his nearly quarter-century career. But it hasn't often been as compelling as on his 11th long player, *Natural Forces* (which, on the title track, rhymes with "home is where my horse is"). Essentially the third chapter of the country-centric trilogy he's been unspooling since 1996's *The Road to Ensenada* and 2003's *My Baby Don't Tolerate*, Lovett's latest is an epic in the wide-open Texas tradition, featuring four original songs ("Natural Forces" and "Empty Blue Shoes" ranking among the finest he's written) and another seven from various Texas songwriters, including Lovett's heroes Townes Van Zandt and Robert Earl Keen (who co-wrote "It's Rock and Roll," the gritty, uptempo, album closer). Far more than just a curator and tasteful interpreter of others' material, Lovett once again proves he can stand alongside the finest storytellers. **COREY DUBROWA** **8.3**

Norah Jones photo by Autumn De Wilde



VARIOUS ARTISTS

Ciao My Shining Star: The Songs of Mark Mulcahy

SHOUT! FACTORY

Stipe, Yorke and The National headline benefit for ex-Miracle Legion frontman

All-star tributes are too rarely bestowed upon those most in need of recognition. Mark Mulcahy's long overdue moment in the sun is a bittersweet one, as *Ciao My Shining Star* adapts the veteran singer/songwriter's outstanding back catalog largely into a poignant memorial to his wife, Melissa, who died tragically last year. With Mulcahy (Miracle Legion, Polaris) left to care for his three-year-old twin daughters alone, an impressive lineup of alt-rock luminaries joined forces for this diverse and frequently moving benefit album. Stepping up are A-List admirers Thom Yorke, Michael Stipe and The National, who frontload the compilation with intense, shadowy takes on Mulcahy's comparatively warm, intimate originals. Appropriately, though, it's the less-celebrated contributors who do the man's songs the most justice—Vic Chesnutt's "Little Man" and Frank Turner's passionate "The Quiet One" stand out. Twenty-nine additional tracks, including contributions from A.C. Newman and Laura Veirs, are also available for purchase online.

ANDREW CLAYMAN 8.0

ERIN MCKEOWN

Hundreds of Lions

RIGHTEOUS BABE

McKeown continues to distinguish herself with clever lyrics and instrumentation

It can be hard to stand out in today's landscape of female songwriters, where vocal acrobatics and wild orchestral accompaniment have become de rigeur, but on her latest, Erin McKeown offers a few blossoms in the brush. While the lush instrumentation on openers "to a Hammer" and "santa cruz" is bright and pleasant, and the playful rockabilly number "the Rascal" is a foot-stomping good time, *Hundreds of Lions* truly shines as it begins to slow down. On "you, sailor," the strong-willed and witty McKeown softens with gentle vocals and the stunning hum of whistles and strings. On raw, crackling closing track "seaMless," McKeown's voice glides atop simple guitar strums and chirping birds, hinting at the conditions in which the multi-instrumentalist made the record—independently, in a farmhouse studio in the New England countryside. McKeown's guard is down as she muses on the vulnerability and humility required for real intimacy: "We are tiny when held against the sky ... we are fused you and I / what do I care how seamless is the line / where we begin and end?"

CATHERINE PREWITT 7.0

FLIGHT OF THE CONCHORDS

I Told You I Was Freaky

SUB POP

Kiwi comedy duo falls flat

A musical comedy record where the tunes are more memorable than the actual jokes makes for an Eeyore of an album, as HBO's Flight of the Conchords are the latest to prove. Following up 2008's self-titled full-length—as well as their 2007 Grammy-winning *Distant Future* EP—the New Zealand humor-folk duo takes a cue from another successful musical-comedy act, The Lonely Island, exchanging much of its previously low-key hilarity for the latter's throbbing Timberlake/Timbaland beats. From a vaguely unfunny faux-rap tune ("Hurt Feelings") to a practically unlistenable faux-R&B-banger ("I Told You I Was Freaky"), both of which have pretty excellent production but not much lyrical substance, the Conchords are at their best when they're trafficking in actual narratives as opposed to storyless attempts at yuks. Ultimately, as much of *Freaky* wallows in the jokes, the record runs out of ideas astonishingly early. It's telling that only three of the songs here are exclusive to the album. Flight of the Conchords' humor is best experienced during the show, and unless you're a completist or fanatic, there's no reason to seek out this record.

AUSTIN L. RAY 4.1

THE CLIENTELE

Bonfires on the Heath

MERGE

Autumnal surveyors of disappearing Middle England add another chapter to yellow-paged diary

"Late October, sunlight in the wood / Nothing here quite moves the way it should," sings Clientele frontman Alasdair MacLean in characteristically breathy fashion on the title track of his quartet's sixth LP, the strictly-tea-and-tweed *Bonfires on the Heath*. For those who cherished the late, great Go-Betweens, Galaxie 500 and The Zombies, take heart—here is your new favorite album, filled to bursting with shivering tremolo guitars, surrealist poetry and the sort of melodies that made the kids' knees buckle whenever "Time of the Season" graced the airwaves. Sure, this sepia-toned world barely exists today outside the boundaries of Oxford's Botanic Garden, the Kinks' *Village Green Preservation Society* or the pages of Patrick Hamilton's *Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky*, but it's a romantic, tantalizing place all the same, one that revels in its sadness and glorifies the antiquity of its contours. "Everything here has a place and a time, we're only passing through," MacLean intones on "Harvest Time." Breathe in that frosty, spice-scented air once again—it's Clientele time.

COREY DUBROWA 8.5

SUSAN ENAN

Plainsong

INDEPENDENT

Long-awaited debut from Belfast songbird

In the early days of this magazine, an EP arrived at the *Paste* office that stopped me dead in my tracks. Four simple songs with simple hooks, and a gorgeous, hushed voice bringing them to life with minimal accompaniment. We made her one of our first artists to watch, referencing her "slow and steady approach." But I had no idea just how slow and steady it would be. Six years later, those four songs are finally on Enan's debut full-length, and they're all grown up. In fact, tasteful strings, piano and soft, jangly guitar call to mind a host of adult-contemporary artists like Sarah McLachlan and Shawn Colvin. But underneath the production are the same lovely melodies that swept me away on first listen. "Moonlight" would have fit perfectly on Norah Jones' *Come Away With Me*, the soundtrack to millions of late nights by a crackling fire and dozens of tender moments on TV. And "Bird" is the kind of song that could give John Mayer a respite from radio domination without wearing thin. Still, some of the albums' best moments are on new tunes, like "Monoplain" and "The Grave," when the instrumentation is stripped down and Enan's delicate voice has room to flower.

JOSH JACKSON 8.4

ONLINE Read an interview with The Clientele at PasteMagazine.com/November09.

ATLAS SOUND

Logos KRANKY

Deerhunter frontman releases finished version of leaked demos

Proving it's dangerous to be a prolific artist in the MP3 era, Bradford Cox suffered some self-inflicted damage in August 2008 when he unintentionally made public an entire album's worth of demos. Initially he was so dejected by this self-inflicted leak that he threatened to scrap everything, but he eventually released the songs—and they now comprise *Logos*. Intending to move beyond the limitations of bedroom laptop pop, Cox recorded the bulk of this second Atlas Sound album while on tour, collaborating with Animal Collective's Panda Bear on the joyously majestic '60s-sunshine-pop tune "Walkabout" and Stereolab's Laetitia Sadier on the nine-minute "Quick Canal," an exercise in swirling shoegazer guitars and krautrock rhythms. Despite Cox's attempt at drawing more people into Atlas Sound's inner circle, *Logos* is still a predominantly insular affair and all the better for it, with his aching melodies and ethereal arrangements pushing open the doors to a remarkably vivid inner world. **8.4**

MATT FINK

Atlas Sound photo by Lockett Pundt

SCOTLAND YARD GOSPEL CHOIR

...and the horse you rode in on

BLOODSHOT

Art-pop hopefuls issue another rough gem

"Oh my god, my life is so fucked up," Elia Einhorn emotes in the most overwrought fashion possible on the otherwise lightly swinging "Something's Happening," delivering the clincher for both laughs and blood: "I'm supposed to go out with Alie to a midnight movie at the Music Box / Maybe we'll see *That Sinking Feeling*, maybe we'll see *A Clockwork Orange*." It's this tension between dystopia and depression, situation comedy and ultraviolence, that makes Scotland Yard Gospel Choir more than your average Belle & Sebastian lite. Einhorn writes ditties about women who "kicked the shit out of my heart," failed suicide attempts, emotionally empty one-night stands, the possibility of a godless existence and other end-of-this-world tidbits left behind like so many existential breadcrumbs on life's gravel path. And yet, despite this none-more-bleak worldview, it all comes across like Morrissey circa *The Queen is Dead*, played for self-skewering yuks like the darkest moments of a tragic standup comedian, moments before the accidental OD. Imagine the Mekons covering "Girlfriend in a Coma" and you've got a fairly good idea of what SYGC is going for on this record. **7.7**

COREY DUBROWA

RICKIE LEE JONES

Balm in Gilead

FANTASY/CONCORD

Wild girl returns with headphone album

"It's hard to be older and poor, I don't dig it that much anymore," Rickie Lee Jones sings on "Wild Girl," the opening track of her 13th album. Although she's in character, it's odd to hear her sing that line; 30 years into an unpredictable career, she still sounds like the wild girl she once was. The largely self-produced *Balm in Gilead* plies a folksy yet soulful jazz-country sound that showcases both her inimitable voice—with its playful meter and peculiar grain—and her studio prowess. Odd sounds abound: the bowed bass on the heavily choral "His Jeweled Floor," the watery vocal treatment and bold reeds on "Blue Ghazel," the tsk-tsking percussion on "The Gospel of Carlos, Norman and Smith." Jones' ambition is to create Americana's *Kid A*: a headphone album that prizes soundscape as heartily as songwriting. For once, the sonics trump the lyrics, but just barely. **7.4**

STEPHEN M. DEUSNER

RUSSIAN CIRCLES

Geneva

SUICIDE SQUEEZE

Instrumental band runs in loops on third album

More than most bands saddled with the vague "post-rock" label, Russian Circles effectively pares down its sound to two basic elements: thunderous riffs and tight rhythms. No vocals obstruct its instrumental onslaught—which, on the band's third album, *Geneva*, is mighty but repetitive. Each track traces the same loud/soft dynamic, which makes the songs both thematically cohesive and redundant. The album picks up its pace with the aerodynamic "Malko," the song's forward motion giving the riffing some much-needed urgency. But the strings on 10-minute closer "Philos" sound staid and haughty—a pale version of Mogwai's shapely excursions and Explosions In The Sky's tender triumphalism. Guitarist Mike Sullivan makes the '70s-metal influence obvious on churning opener "Fathom," and the rhythm section of drummer Dave Turncrantz and bass player Brian Cook pound diligently, but there's more artful noodling on *Geneva* than heavy crunch. Ultimately, Russian Circles pummel too politely. **4.8**

STEPHEN M. DEUSNER

YEE-HAW & YANG

The duality of a modern roots-rock legend

BY GEOFFREY HIMES

ROBERT EARL KEEN

The Rose Hotel LOST HIGHWAY

Robert Earl Keen practices two very different kinds of Texas music. On one hand, he has a gift for the kind of understated, skeptical, literary songwriting pursued by his mentors Townes Van Zandt and Guy Clark, and friend and neighbor Lyle Lovett. On the other, Keen has become a hero to Lone Star State fratboys who sing along lustily to Keen choruses celebrating guns, alcohol and squandered hours. As a result, some folks blame him for Pat Green.

It's tempting to claim that the first is the good Keen and the second is the bad, but that's too easy. Creating a chorus that's so obvious, so contagious, so pleasurable that people want to sing along is a rare pop-music talent, and he's got it. On his new album, *The Rose Hotel*, you can hear Keen's two sides wrestling with each other, as they have for much of his career. Only when those two sides accommodate one another does his music truly work.

He strikes the right balance on the new disc's title track. The rousing, infectious chorus sounds like an ode to drunken excess: "Sometimes you run, sometimes you stall, sometimes you don't get up at all." But the verses boast the kind of detailed, detached observation that would do Van Zandt proud: A man hangs out in an alley with wild dogs, a woman listens to oldies radio in an old hotel—both wondering if they should try to connect one more time. As the story slowly unfolds, we realize that the chorus isn't about a raucous keg party but about our often-doomed attempts to find love, making it sadder and richer than we'd thought. The song wouldn't be half as good if it had lacked either the disarming universality of the chorus or the bittersweet particulars of the verses.

Something similar happens with "On And On." The first verse offers the splendid image of a boy running around a fenced ring where his teenage sweetheart is riding a strawberry roan through the purple twilight. Subsequent verses offer similar rites of passage—a young man playing old blues tunes, a married couple in a harbor cabin, a man asking unanswerable questions in a cemetery—and the chorus ties it all together by simply repeating the title as if the cycles of life were endless.

And it's not just the lyrics. The music of "On And On" marries the mundane and the mysterious, too, adding an undercurrent of swirling, otherworldly guitar to the bouncy country two-step. When Keen remakes Van Zandt's "Flying Shoes," he adds a fat, funky bottom, as if he were singing it with the E Street Band. And Danny Barnes' prickly banjo and Bill Whitbeck's groaning harmonica give the slow blues of "Goodbye Cleveland" the necessary weight to pull together stray lines about dead bluesmen and drinking.

Without that weight, Keen becomes the Texas equivalent of post-1978 Jimmy Buffett, a panderer to the escapism of hedonist slackers everywhere. This is most obvious on "Something That I Do," but it also leads to the easy jokes of "Wireless In Heaven" and perfunctory Levon Helm tribute, "The Man Behind The Drums." Worst of all, it leads to "10,000 Chinese Walk Into A Bar," which tries to mock drunks telling jokes badly and becomes a badly told joke itself.

> Only when Keen's two distinct sides accommodate one another does his music truly work. *The Rose Hotel*'s title track wouldn't be half as good if it lacked either the disarming universality of the chorus or the bittersweet particulars of the verses.

"Throwing Rocks" threatens to be another such song. It begins with commonplace phrases about holing up in a shack with a new lover and watching time crawl by like the nearby river. But when the singer's lover runs off with another man, the song's mood flips. Now time is slowed by despair, not infatuation, and the chorus about throwing rocks in the river has a new, different meaning.

It's the kind of switcheroo Van Zandt might've appreciated, but Van Zandt never came up with a chorus so lusciously singable, so likely to lead into a dizzying coda of soul-diva wailing and banjo scratching. When Keen links those two sides of his talent, he's like no one else.

7.8

Photo by Peter Figen

9.2

SUFJAN STEVENS

The BQE

ASTHMATIC KITTY

7.6

OSSO

Run Rabbit Run

ASTHMATIC KITTY

Stevens remakes the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway—and gets a makeover himself

Though we're nearing the five-year anniversary of his last proper studio album, Sufjan Stevens has stayed active since his landmark *Illinois*. In November 2007 he debuted *The BQE*, a multimedia tribute to the seemingly mundane Brooklyn-Queens Expressway that included an orchestra, three simultaneously projected films and live hula hoopers, and that was performed over three nights at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. Ever the perfectionist, Stevens took two years to record and edit this combination CD/DVD set which presents the project in its entirety with an essay by Stevens, a comic book and a vintage View-Master reel added for good measure. With his sweeping, swooning, swirling orchestral arrangements leading the way, it's an utterly enchanting amalgam of Gershwin and Warhol, Copland and Brakhage, somehow weaving traffic jams, grainy cityscapes and construction sites into a rich tapestry of percolating humanity. It's his most ambitious undertaking to date, and while it presents no obvious singles or easy entry points, he pulls it off without it feeling pretentious or ponderous.

But *The BQE* isn't Stevens' first album-long orchestral experiment. His most chin-stroke-inducing work to date, 2001's *Enjoy Your Rabbit*, has long been his catalog's electronic-music outlier—a maze of meticulously arranged and texturally dense instrumentals that each represent a symbol of the Chinese Zodiac. Now Osso, the New York- and Berlin-based string quartet that performed the string arrangements for Stevens' *Illinois*, provides an alternate-universe interpretation. Commissioned by Stevens and featuring the arrangements of six composers, *Run Rabbit Run* re-imagines the conceptual song cycle as a remarkably pliable and surprisingly tangible avant-garde composition, its crackling glitches and imposing synthesizers translated into gorgeous sweeping trills, scratchy bow scrapes and sweetly sighing refrains. Thoroughly deconstructed but retaining the spirit of Stevens' original vision, it offers more evidence that the test of a great song is how ripe it is for reinterpretation. **MATT FINK**

GIFT OF GAB

Escape 2 Mars

CORNERSTONE RECORDING ARTS SOCIETY]

Skilled MC dons space suit once again, but remains Earthbound

Never tell Gift of Gab the odds. If the languid MC suddenly found himself navigating the asteroid field in *Empire Strikes Back*, the Millennium Falcon's every evasive maneuver depending on the bob and weave of his flow, he'd fly the ship to safety like a hip-hop Han Solo. Keeping busy as partner in rhyme to DJ and production specialist Chief Xcel in lauded duo Blackalicious, Gab took five years to follow his masterful solo debut *4th Dimensional Rocketships Going Up*, a record as obsessed with scientific discovery as spiritual awakening. But even with Gab's phonetic prowess and all that time to prepare for launch, *Escape 2 Mars* doesn't reach the transcendent heights of its sublime, lushly orchestrated predecessor, ultimately feeling less like an epic interplanetary voyage and more like space camp. But who didn't fantasize about going to space camp as a kid? Space camp is fun! And so is *Escape 2 Mars*. At its best ("E2MTRO," "Spotlight" and the title track), the record plays like rap's funky answer to David Bowie's "Space Oddity" and "Life on Mars?" And at its worst— hey, it's still way better than the *Star Wars* prequels. **STEVE LABATE**

5.8

SWITCHFOOT

Hello Hurricane

ATLANTIC

They'll rock you like a... well, you know

Yes, the voice of Switchfoot frontman Jon Foreman does sound more than a little like Bono's, especially on U2-conjuring anthems like "Always." And sure—with the band's wide-angle, phones-in-the-air approach seemingly aimed for the nosebleed seats, Switchfoot has much in common with arena-rocking peers like Coldplay and Snow Patrol. You don't listen to Switchfoot for groundbreaking originality. The band's seventh full-length is meat-and-potatoes arena rock polished to a gleaming sheen (thanks to producer Mike Elizondo), wrapped around huge hooks and intercut by Foreman's incisive, discontented lyrics, which almost always manage to translate sentiments rooted deeply in faith to universally relatable choruses. While *Hello Hurricane* has its share of aching ballads and mid-tempo head-nodders, the stars here are all-out rockers like "Mess of Me," "The Sound (John M. Perkins Blues)" and "Bullet Soul," which feature some of the most aggressive sounds this San Diego crew has ever recorded. **REID DAVIS**

7.4

LUCERO

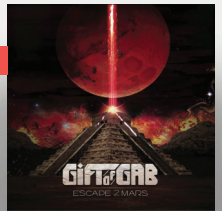
1372 Overton Park

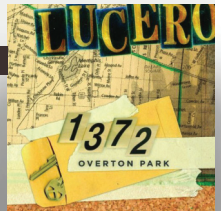
UNIVERSAL REPUBLIC

Memphis rockers channel The Boss

Like Springsteen's *Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J.*, Lucero's sixth album is named after the band's home (*1372 Overton Park* was the address of the Memphis crew's loft) and it's comprised of anthemic story songs of lonely nights in the city's darkest corners. While Ben Nichols' sandpaper howl has always done his soulful hometown justice, this time Lucero adds a horn section to its dusty country punk for some extra Memphis flavor. But *Overton Park* best reps its city when it's not trying so hard. While Lucero could've passed on the E Street saxes, Springsteen's our-gang-versus-the-man mentality suits the band well. When Nichols growls, "Me and my friends, we might not look like much, but we got the time and know when to push our luck" (on bar-fight soundtrack "Sounds of the City"), you know which side of the rumble you should be on. **JUSTIN JACOBS**

6.9





Switchfoot photo by Andy Barron

HEAVY TRASH

Midnight Soul Serenade

BIG LEGAL MESS/FAT POSSUM

Retro daredevils dust off rock 'n' roll roots

Souped-up rockabilly duo Heavy Trash deftly restores and reinvigorates the primitive era of rock and blues on its third LP, offering tinny, gritty and gnarled throwback production that pays tribute to the golden days of greasers. The band is revved by a mixture of Jon Spencer's raw vocal ravings and Matt Verta-Ray's fervid guitar peals. Frenzies like "Gee, I Really Love You" and "Bumble Bee" illustrate Spencer's droll disposition and sound like a collaboration between Buddy Holly and Mick Jagger. Spencer channels more rhythm than melody in his deliveries, the pinnacle being "The Pill," a trippy narrative where the dragging lines serve as a ball and chain to *Midnight*'s otherwise brisk progression. **6.2**

GAGE HENRY

THAO WITH THE GET DOWN STAY DOWN

Know Better Learn Faster

KILL ROCK STARS

The best revenge

It begins with a threat, bare and ominous. "If this is how you want it / Okay, okay," Thao Nguyen and a seething chorus of friends howl on the first track of her third LP, just before the song bursts into a cacophony of righteous hand claps bearing along the line's portentous fury. Repeated four times, each time it becomes more clear: This girl is pissed. And she has a posse. And whoever the guy is that sparked this collection of reeling post-breakup songs, he had better brace himself. She's doing more than airing some unsuspecting ex's dirty laundry: Unleashing lyrics like "What am I, just a body in your bed? / Won't you reach for that body in your bed?" on the crippling "Body," Nguyen proves she hardly needs a clothesline to string up any fella that crosses her (and also that she acknowledges her own guilt in the matter). No, it's even more devastating—all those failures and regrets and sad, private moments made public in a magnificent musical catharsis. Abetted by Tucker Martine's warm, piquant production, the songs swerve from the bouyant, jangly pop of "Cool Yourself" to the trembling lament of "But What of the Strangers," with its finger-picked guitar and shuddering organ. Nguyen's band and musical guests provide cavernous backing vocals throughout; Andrew Bird whistles and bows on the title track, and there's often a Stephen Malkmus tinge to her drawl and lilting electric guitar. But *Know Better Learn Faster* mostly sounds like a young artist coming into her own—in music and life and love. On *We Brave Bee Stings And All*, her 2008 Kill Rock Stars debut, a less lovelorn Nguyen sang, "We don't dive, we cannonball / And we splash our eyes full of chemicals / Just so there's none left for little girls," and she's more than kept that promise here, throwing herself headlong into suffering for our benefit—and the payoff is glorious. This *is* how we want it. **8.6**

RACHAEL MADDUX

ISLANDS

Vapours

ANTI-

Sounds like The Killers, but better

This whole album is good, just know that up front. You can do what the kids used to do—"buy" this music at a "record store"—and you will be happy. But let's say you want to go track by track. First, download "Disarming The Car Bomb," a burbling rocker with an endlessly re-playable outro that sounds like Springsteen hooting over a battered barroom piano. Then go for the Auto-Tuned "Heartbeat" and the creamy tropical bliss of "On Foreigner." But don't stop there. You also need "No You Don't," which borrows its tasty keyboard lick from Cyndi Lauper's "All Through The Night." This song is about drugs, and it gets echoed a few tracks later in the howling refrain of another song, "The Drums," which might as well be called "The Drugs." That's how *Vapours* works: The songs don't sound much alike, but they bleed into one another. They're slippery, and over too fast, and they leave behind a trail of mist. **8.7**

NICK MARINO

BROOKE WAGGONER

Go Easy Little Doves

SWOON MOON MUSIC

Delightful piano pop

On *Go Easy Little Doves*, poignant orchestrations reflect Brooke Waggoner's classical training, and her affinity for motion-picture scores is evident in her writing. While it assumes a slower pace than her previous work, the album still centers on bright piano progressions and whimsical, heartfelt lyrics. Vibrant string arrangements and choice woodwinds swell and fall; vocally, Waggoner performs in earnest—her voice floating over quivering violins and soaring into the ether. A blissful 35 minutes and change, the self-produced effort chronicles love in its many forms: She sings of young love on the title track, love abandoned on "Find Her Floods" and redemptive love on "Body." Instrumental tracks begin and end the album, gracefully setting the scene for the vignettes between them. **8.1**

NIKKI KING

Islands photo by Aliya Naumoff

ONLINE Read an interview with Thao at PasteMagazine.com/November09.

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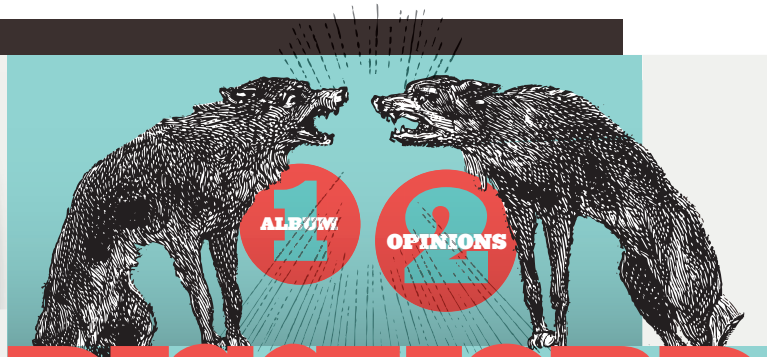

DISCHORD

ALEC OUNSWORTH

Mo Beauty ANTI-

A hauntingly gorgeous contradiction in terms

On his first solo effort, the Clap Your Hands Say Yeah frontman continues his enthusiastic experiments with strange sound combinations. He's pensive these days—mellow and introverted—and his self-questioning lyrics are matched with a fittingly eerie sound. The album is well conceived with articulate themes running throughout, as when Ounsworth laments the fall of New Orleans in "Holy, Holy, Holy Moses" and then later channels the city's brass-laden funeral marches into the dirt-smudged "Idiots in the Rain." Ounsworth's resounding use of strings, horns, piano and percussion appears and disappears at unexpected moments with beautifully unsettling results. But his chaotic sonic messes are somehow always under control (note how the clanging cymbals align with the taut vocals on "Bones in the Grave"). *Mo Beauty* is an album full of idiosyncrasies, but Ounsworth's consummate eye to its construction turns dissonance into harmony. **8.1**

EMILY RIEMER

ANNIE

Don't Stop

SMALLTOWN SUPERSOUND

Half formula, half adventure

"Do you want more, baby, do you want more?" These are the first words Annie purrs on her sophomore album, a come-on that would fit snugly on a Britney Spears anthology. It may seem befuddling how this Norwegian singer gets the indie oligarchy's sacred seal of approval while other remarkably similar pop acts don't. But listening to the rest of *Don't Stop*, it becomes clear that Annie is more adventurous than her peers. The top half of the record offers a heaping serving of the big-beat oomph that first catapulted her to international acclaim. (See, for instance, the rollicking "My Love Is Better," which plays like the soundtrack to the world's greatest pinball machine.) Her production team polishes every surface to a euphoric, neon sheen. But side two tweaks the formula, most notably with the haunted orchestral fog of "Marie Cherie." It's an inspired recasting of Annie's wispy voice, which seems to ring truest when draped in melancholy. That vulnerability—more than anything else—sets Annie apart from the pack. **7.4**

JEREMY GOLDMEIER

NELLIE MCKAY

Normal As Blueberry Pie: A Tribute to Doris Day

VERVE

SWEET AS PIE

Nellie McKay's gorgeously understated new album, *Normal As Blueberry Pie*, is everything a tribute record should be. McKay shows a genuine love and respect for her subject, not to mention a seemingly intuitive understanding of the long-forgotten appeal of singer/actress Doris Day—who, over the years, has become synonymous with the stodgy, overly sentimental schmaltz of the irony-free era from which she came, an era that seems to lie across the chasm of history, out of our reach. Backed by some fantastically talented jazz musicians, McKay bridges this gap, breathing life into Day's out-of-vogue material; giving old standards a new sense of purpose that transcends nostalgia and makes them feel at home in the modern world. She tackles both popular and obscure Day-delivered numbers—written by legends like George and Ira Gershwin, Rodgers and Hammerstein, Burt Bacharach and Hal David, Johnny Mercer, and Antonio Carlos Jobim—with an endearing earnestness, a hushed grace, and a blustery voice that's like a crisp autumn wind rustling the last brightly colored leaves from the trees in Central Park. It's the freshest these songs have sounded in years. **STEVE LABATE**

PIE IN THE SKY

Nellie McKay's appeal revolves around the perceived subversive edge that casts her silliest quirks as potentially insubordinate acts—in that context, it's a dangerous move to make an album free of satirical camp. *Normal As Blueberry Pie*, then, might be the most daring album McKay has made. Her devotion to the Doris Day catalog is unquestionable, and her attempt to recreate the original aura of those recordings leaves no room for any suspicion that she's lampooning the very era of American innocence and wholesome optimism that she's used as contrast to her cute-yet-caustic persona. Unfortunately, the album also leaves little room for her 1000-watt personality, and the result is a classy but conceptually stilted set of renditions, imaginatively redrawn and dutifully performed but otherwise lacking anything that would make McKay's versions more than entry points for further excavation. Lovingly redundant, it's a vanity project that allows McKay to prove her skills as an interpreter while handicapping the biting wit and unpredictable energy that made her so special in the first place. **MATT FINK**

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ANOTHER FAB FOUR

Best of Jesus Lizard catalog gets deluxe-reissue treatment

BY AUSTIN L. RAY

THE JESUS LIZARD

Pure/Head 7.5
Goat 9.4
Liar 8.0
Down 6.1
TOUCH AND GO

In certain shadowy circles of the rock 'n' roll universe, The Jesus Lizard are The Beatles. And despite the fact that All Music Guide's entry on the former begins, "Willfully abrasive and atonal..." and that the latter wrote scores of catchy ditties that are etched into our collective psyche, the bands have more in common than one might imagine, especially in terms of influence. Of course, this wasn't always so. "It's pretty weird that there are no bands like The Jesus Lizard around anymore," *Pitchfork*'s Brent DiCrescenzo began his review of rarities/singles collection, *Bang*, in 2000. "...The absence of cacophonous, piss-drinking, steel-chewing rock sums up the current climate. Young musicians seem hesitant to frighten and discomfort." He has a point. Or did, at least, at the time.

Indeed, The Jesus Lizard made subsequent groups classified under the increasingly useless umbrella of "indie rock" look and sound like whimpering newborns, tinkering with instruments containing too many strings, staring into the middle distance and ruffling absolutely no one. After all, this is a band—along with the Butthole Surfers, Royal Trux, Sonic Youth, et al—whose music fits into a subgenre known as *pigfuck*, a term initially coined as a pejorative by Robert Christgau. (Go ahead: It's a safe-for-work Google.) Which is to say, you won't see Grizzly Bear opening any dates on The Jesus Lizard's current reunion tour.

Given all of the above, it may surprise some to find out that the group's influence is actually quite pervasive. Bands creating excellent rock records in recent years, bands such as Mclusky and Pissed Jeans, though unique in their own ways, owe a clear debt to Jesus Lizard frontman David Yow and Co. Which answers—along with the reunion—the "Why now?" of Touch and Go's remastered reissues of the band's finest material.

Following the 1987 disbanding of Yow and bassist David Wm. Sims' previous band, Texas noisemongers Scratch Acid, Yow moved to Chicago to play bass in a band with former Cult Cargo guitarist Duane Denison. As the story goes, Yow realized he didn't play bass very well, and brought Sims, who had been playing with Steve Albini (more on him in a moment) in Rapeman. With the aid of a drum machine (soon to be replaced by ferocious stickman Mac McNeilly), on their debut EP *Pure*, the nexus of The Jesus Lizard was formed.

Starting with *Pure* (which is now paired with the reissue of debut full-length *Head*), the Touch and Go reissues comprehensively cover the essential Jesus Lizard, especially as far as non-obsessives will be concerned. Each of these four deluxe packages comes with previously unreleased photos, plus liner notes from the bandmates and the writers who watched them develop. The remastering—led by Bob Weston and aided by Albini (who produced all of the band's T&G material before acrimoniously parting ways when they signed to a major label) using his original studio notes—is well-executed and crisp. Live tracks, goofy covers and outtakes also abound.

But words can't quite capture how *Goat*—as far as records go—really is one of the Greatest Of All Time, a designation that suggests its name was either a) not accidental or b) prophetic. And words can't quite capture what an astounding, oft-incomprehensible and terrifying frontman Yow is—perhaps best approximated in print by Michael Azerrad in *Our Band Could Be Your Life*: "Yow sounds like a kidnap victim trying to howl through the duct tape over his mouth."

The Jesus Lizard made subsequent groups classified under the increasingly useless umbrella of "indie rock" look and sound like whimpering newborns.

A strange mystique surrounds The Jesus Lizard and the four LPs these four bandmates put out on Touch and Go over a span of four years, each album with a four-letter title. Perhaps it's the same mystique that draws so many new artists to their sound 20 years later—the same mystique, perhaps, that led (fun-fact alert!) Kevin Smith to ask them to contribute a song to *Clerks*. Indeed, The Jesus Lizard's story is filled with this kind of unassailable, inborn coolness that's impossible to pinpoint but also impossible to miss. And it's a story told in full by these reissues—a story of four young lads who made seismic music that still resonates years after their heyday. A lot like The Beatles, when you think about it.

Photo by EWOLF

AUSTIN L. RAY IS PASTE'S WEB EDITOR. LIKE A NERD, HE BOUGHT HIS TICKET FOR THE JESUS LIZARD'S ATLANTA REUNION SHOW FOUR MONTHS IN ADVANCE.

VARIOUS ARTISTS

Light: On The South Side

THE NUMERO GROUP

The gorgeous sights and sounds of '70s Chicago blues

Afro-topped women's libbers, fedora-clad gangsters and bespectacled academics: The black men and women who inhabit photographer Michael Abramson's hedonistic photos of '70s Chicago blues clubs span the social and historical spectrum. In new book *Light: On the South Side*, we witness a time when the meeting point of Howlin' Wolf and James Brown still catalyzed black American life—the last time, as Nick Hornby says in the introduction, that "the past and the future [coexisted] so peaceably." Accompanying the 132-page book of baroque black-and-white photos of clubgoers comes a CD/double-LP of the blues funk these fans were likely dancing to, like Lucille Spann's "Women's Lib"—with its nasty backbeat and wah-wah-laden grind about getting *equally* paid—and Willie Williams' harmonica-funk highlight "Detroit Blues." *Light* is not only the most ambitious reissue to date by crate-digging label The Numero Group, it's their most accomplished—equally valuable to social historians and plain-ol' fans of killer music. **9.1**

JUSTIN HOPPER

HARMONIA & ENO '76

Tracks and Traces

GRÖNLAND RECORDS/ HIGH WIRE MUSIC

A few more relics excavated from the tomb of "lost" Krautrock classic

Krautrock has become synonymous with a steady motorik pulse, but the German electronic-music vanguard of the 1970s was more diverse than that. Cluster, for instance, had more in common with Brian Eno than Kraftwerk—and, after Cluster became Harmonia, the band collaborated with Eno in an epic jam session that remains mostly mythical. The recordings weren't released, and Eno's masters were lost. But one Harmonia member, Hans-Joachim Roedelius, edited together an album from the plentiful four-track material and released it in 1997 as *Tracks and Traces*. This reconstituted version includes three more tracks, selected by Rother. The new material includes "Welcome," a dreamy braid of synthesizer and guitar, and "Atmosphere," a minor-key creeper that practically screams "obscure Italian horror flick!" A synthetic/organic melting pot where experimental electronics meet birdsong and wind, *Tracks and Traces* is a Krautrock classic with a heavily mediated release history that renders it ultimately mysterious—the more music we hear, the further we get from what actually happened in that room. **8.0**

BRIAN HOWE

ÉDOUARD-LÉON SCOTT DE MARTINVILLE

"No. 5" ("Au Claire de la Lune")

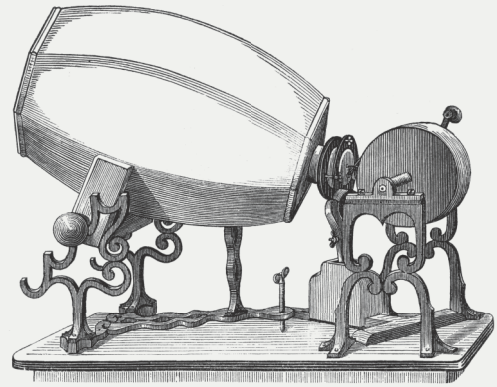
DUST-TO-DIGITAL/ PARLORTONE

Earliest sound recording an intriguing historical tidbit, but not everyone will need to own it on vinyl

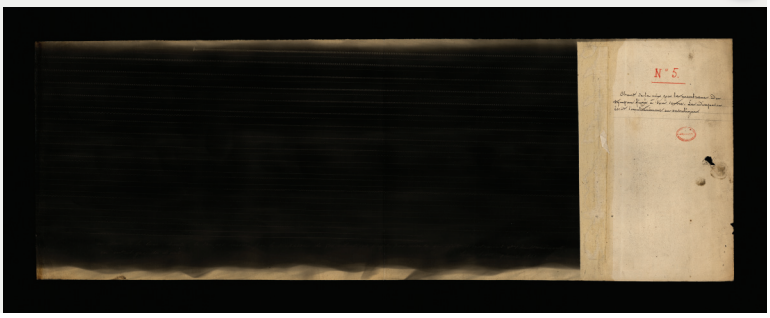
On April 9, 1860, 17 years before Thomas Edison invented the phonograph, French scientist Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville made the world's first successful sound recording. And of all the sounds he might've attempted to capture, he chose the human voice, singing a song. This painstakingly restored release—discovered at the Institute of France's Academy of Sciences in 2008—was originally preserved on a sheet of paper wrapped around a cylinder under a smoking lantern, the soundwaves cast in ash. It's a fittingly rock 'n' roll beginning for the recording industry. Listening now, a century-and-a-half later, one can't help but ponder how Martinville must've felt; capturing something as ethereal and intangible as sound in 1860 must've been akin to catching and holding a ghost. Of course, Martinville's experimental take of himself singing "Au Claire de la Lune" (labeled "No. 5," though no earlier takes have been found) is little more than a 20-second blast of static with a barely audible voice delivering an even less audible melody—a little bit like the end of Wilco's *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*. Guess it only took us about 140 years to come full circle. Thanks to Dust-to-Digital, the full recording of "No. 5" can be heard for free online (dust-digital.com/newsletters/09-08.htm), so not everyone will feel compelled to spend $7 on the limited-edition 45-rpm vinyl package. But for some, myself included, owning this tiny but monumentally important piece of history feels incredibly satisfying. This is as close as we'll ever get to that first mysterious moment that forever changed our world. **5.0**

STEVE LABATE

➥ Édouard-Léon Scott de Martinville



➥ Mechanism that captured Martinville's recording



➥ Sheet of paper containing "No. 5"

LESSONS UNLEARNED

Scherfig and Hornby telegraph instead of relying of talented cast

BY ROBERT DAVIS

AN EDUCATION

RELEASE DATE: OCT. 9

DIRECTOR: Lone Scherfig
WRITER: Nick Hornby (based on a memoir by Lynn Barber)
STARRING: Carey Mulligan, Peter Sarsgaard, Alfred Molina, Dominic Cooper
CINEMATOGRAPHER: John de Borman
STUDIO/RUN TIME: Sony Pictures Classics, 95 mins.

It's been said many times that 50 percent of a movie director's job is casting, and *An Education* makes that case nicely. The film has star power behind the camera, with Lone Scherfig directing and Nick Hornby writing the screenplay, but the film's nuance comes from its two lead actors—relative newcomer Carey Mulligan and the ever-reliable Peter Sarsgaard—who enrich a conventional story that, otherwise, runs on little more than air.

Made up and shot to look like a homely Audrey Hepburn, Mulligan plays 16-year-old Jenny, an excellent high-school student—except in Latin, where she's middling—and a budding cellist. Her excessively stern father (Alfred Molina) presses her to get that Latin grade up so she can go to Oxford, but she'd rather listen to songs by French chanteuse Juliette Gréco than study after school. As Jenny, Mulligan gives a perfect performance—perky around boys but never flirty, exasperated around her father but never sulky. Like her character, she seems wise beyond her years. Of course, it helps that she's 24.

But for all the acclaim her performance is earning, as much or more belongs to Sarsgaard's David, a random stranger who gives poor Jenny a ride one day when she's stuck in the rain with her cello. With textbook tact and enviable charm, David escorts her home in a wonderfully realized "meet cute" moment that barely evinces anything inappropriate about a thirtysomething man plying a 16-year-old girl with talk of chamber music. On the surface, it's entirely wholesome, but Sarsgaard can dress, talk and behave like a perfect gentleman while still hinting at something vaguely sinister. It's not just his age, and it's not just the careful writing. It's something about his face or his manner, something about the way he carries experience in his voice. Maybe David's a good guy. But maybe he's not. And that ambiguity has been an asset for nearly every Sarsgaard role. For *An Education*, it's essential.

David and Jenny eventually begin a romance that draws the girl into David's circle of older, more worldly friends and involves a string of escalating vices—skipping class, smoking, maybe even sex and theft.

> At times, Scherfig's awkward strokes make a mockery of the character's subtleties.

The story pushes Jenny to see how far she'll go before snapping back to her good-girl roots. And if her parents would seem to be deterrents, well, David plies them, too, with the same kind of lyrical conversation.

Also, he smokes Bachelor Brand cigarettes. Scherfig shows us multiple times. And he leaves them next to incriminating documents in his glove compartment. Such awkward strokes make a mockery of the character's subtleties, just as the sudden appearance of the saccharine theme from *A Summer Place* thumbs its nose at Jenny's musical favorites. And every appearance of the parents flattens the characters further.

Having set up all kinds of potential with the mystery of David's past and the uncertainty of Jenny's future, Scherfig and Hornby don't seem to know how to unravel the plot. Instead of staying true to the characters and letting the chips fall where they may, they wrap the film up with a perfunctory, after-school-specialized object lesson. These characters are seeking balance between stability and life's pleasures, but *An Education* can't seem to handle the difficult task of finding that balance for itself. Someone's thumb is on the scale. A smart young woman like Jenny ought to come out of the experience a more—not less—interesting person.

6.0

Photo by Kerry Brown, courtesy of Sony Pictures Classics

ROBERT DAVIS IS *PASTE*'S CHIEF FILM CRITIC.

THE MESSENGER

RELEASE DATE: OCT. 30

DIRECTOR: Oren Moverman
WRITERS: Moverman and Alessandro Camon
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Bobby Bukowski
STARRING: Ben Foster, Woody Harrelson, Jena Malone, Samantha Morton
STUDIO/RUN TIME: Oscilloscope Laboratories, 105 mins.

War film well acted and fittingly bleak

It's unfortunate for this film that we're experiencing a collective case of war-movie fatigue; when we're still dealing with these wars on television and in our own communities, it's hard to drag ourselves to the movies to be reminded of how awful it all is. *The Messenger* starts with an interesting premise: A war hero (Ben Foster) sent home to recuperate from injuries is assigned to spend his last three months of active duty on the Casualty Notification squad. It's as depressing as it sounds, and made even less appealing by his partner (Woody Harrelson), who is cynical, clinical and maybe crazy. The performances are understated and hit all the right notes, and the film is naturalistic, almost documentarian in its narrative. But this is the biggest strike against *The Messenger*. It is relentlessly bleak, even in its lighter moments. The downbeat tone is wearying. These days, we just need some hope. **6.8**

ALISSA WILKINSON

PIRATE RADIO

RELEASE DATE: NOV. 13

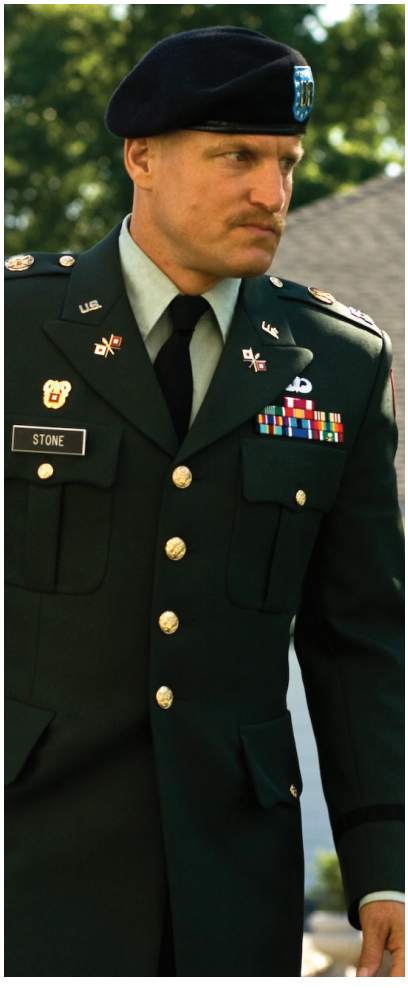
DIRECTOR/WRITER: Richard Curtis
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Danny Cohen
STARRING: Bill Nighy, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Tom Sturridge, Kenneth Branagh
STUDIO/RUN TIME: Focus Features, 135 mins.

Raucous '60s retrospective adrift in simplistic plot

Nobody can accuse Richard Curtis' sophomore directorial effort of being less than a fun time. The writer/director of *Love, Actually* immerses

his work in a sea of floral-lensed escapism, filled with lusty skirt-chasing and fraternal merry-making—and in *Pirate Radio*, a loose timepiece about a radio ship that broadcasts primitive rock 'n' roll in international waters to avoid government regulation, the good vibes keep rolling. It's worth seeing if only to witness Bill Nighy, Philip Seymour Hoffman and Nick Frost yuck it up as hedonistic, paisley-adorned disc jockeys with enough mojo to make Austin Powers blush. The waters become unforgivably shallow, though, if you're expecting a serious look into the legacy of the British Invasion or the film's historical inspiration, Radio Caroline. This is a warm-natured ensemble comedy that's bound to deliver a few smiles—just don't expect much more. **5.7**

SEAN EDGAR



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Messenger photo courtesy of Oscilloscope Laboratories. *Pirate Radio* photo by Alex Bailey

WHIP IT

RELEASE DATE:
OCT. 2

DIRECTOR: Drew Barrymore
WRITER: Shauna Cross
STARRING: Ellen Page, Barrymore, Kristen Wiig, Juliette Lewis, Alia Shawkat
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Robert D. Yeoman
STUDIO/RUN TIME: Fox Searchlight, 111 mins.

Roller-derby comedy throws a few elbows

Drew Barrymore's directorial debut starts with a chain of clichés a mile long and keeps adding more links. But in its final third, *Whip It* turns from a rusty tangle into a sweet and rewarding tale that's far more mature than the setup seems to allow.

Photo by Darren Michaels

Ellen Page plays meek and mild Bliss, a high-school girl dealing with all the things that make a teenager's life such hell. She finds her way into a violent female roller-derby league that ignites her. The women there are older, and use names like "Bloody Holly" and "Smashley Simpson," brought to life by Barrymore with a fun cast of roller-skating comic actors. She's clearly aiming to crack open a market for comedies aimed primarily at girls but that don't alienate guys (the opposite of the usual Hollywood formula), and if she can do it with romantic fake-outs, themes of personal empowerment and stories featuring honest character development, then more power to her. **ROBERT DAVIS**

7.0

NEW YORK, I LOVE YOU

RELEASE DATE: OCT. 16

DIRECTORS: Brett Ratner, Natalie Portman, Mira Nair, Jiang Wen and others
WRITERS: Anthony Minghella, Hall Powell and others
CINEMATOGRAPHERS: Benoit Debie, Pawel Edelman and others
STARRING: Natalie Portman, Orlando Bloom, Bradley Cooper, James Caan
STUDIO/RUN TIME: Vivendi Entertainment, 110 mins.

Romantic travelogue hits turbulence

Like *Paris je t'aime*, its similarly titled forerunner, *New York, I Love You* cobbles a series of interwoven vignettes into a feature focused around metropolitan monogamy and geographic adulation. This new entry takes the process a step further by stitching every character into a shared universe, but the design proves largely inconsequential without a central conflict and conclusion. The biggest problem, though, is the sheer lack of consistency. Just like our favorite hormonally inspired mixtapes, the sum here does not necessarily exceed the parts: Chemistry ranges from adorable (Olivia Thirlby and Anton Yelchin) to combustible (Ethan Hawke and Maggie Q) to downright creepy (Chris Cooper and Robin Wright Penn). The offerings from Brett Ratner and Natalie Portman are the lone hot spots in a line of increasingly impotent misfires from foreign directors who opt for lethargic shots and meandering dialogue. Audiences will have to be extremely charitable to find merit in this uncoordinated train wreck. **SEAN EDGAR** 3.9

BROKEN EMBRACES (LOS ABRAZOS ROTOS)

DIRECTOR/WRITER: Pedro Almodóvar
STARRING: Penélope Cruz, Lluís Homar, Blanca Portillo
RUN TIME: 128 mins.

Celebrated director explores life through movies

Pedro Almodóvar's latest film is an anthology of his previous obsessions—its haunting score (courtesy of long-time collaborator Alberto Iglesias) and deep hues evoke the melodramatic aesthetic that has defined his work since 1997's *Live Flesh*. This is a movie about seeing and being seen, a fact that is evident from the dazzling opening sequence that begins with a close-up of a woman's eye, in which you can see the reflection of a newspaper. The woman reads the paper to a blind man, Harry Caine (Lluís Homar)—a movie director who, 14 years earlier, lost both his vision and his beloved Lena (Penélope Cruz) in a tragic car accident. *Broken Embraces* shifts between the present and past, when Harry Caine met Lena and cast her as the lead role in *Chicas y maletas* ("Girls and Suitcases"), a delicious remake of Almodóvar's first international hit, 1988's *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*. The director/protagonist reveals the autobiographical register of *Broken Embraces*, which is, in the end, the story of a man who makes sense of his life through movies. This film-within-a-film contains many insider references—don't miss the final scene in which Penélope Cruz imitates Pepa, Carmen Maura's character from *Women on the Verge*. Caine, Almodóvar and the audience watch as the fetish actress of Almodóvar's middle age reincarnates the actress that helped catapult him onto the international stage. **ERIC CALDERWOOD** 8.4

HOW DO YOU TALK TO AN ANGEL?

Wim Wenders' masterpiece illuminates the sublime in everyday existence

BY TIM REGAN-PORTER

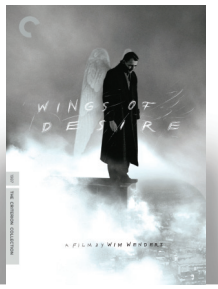
WINGS OF DESIRE: THE CRITERION COLLECTION

DVD RELEASE DATE: NOV. 3

DIRECTOR: Wim Wenders
WRITERS: Wenders, Peter Handke
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Henri Alekan
STARRING: Bruno Ganz, Otto Sander, Peter Falk, Solveig Dommartin
STUDIO/RUN TIME: Criterion, 127 mins.

In this 1987 Wim Wenders classic (finally getting the Criterion treatment this month), two angels, Damiel and Cassiel, watch over a divided Berlin. Sometimes they observe from lofty perches, but mostly they move freely through the ordinary lives of the city's inhabitants, observing and documenting what they see. Occasionally, an angel will put an intangible arm around someone to offer subtle comfort.

One morning, Damiel and Cassiel sit in a BMW on a showroom floor, recalling the previous day. They recount events big and small—mostly small: the sunrise at 7:22, a pedestrian drenching himself while folding his umbrella, a child who



stops blinking while listening to an old man read *The Odyssey*. Later, standing by the Berlin Wall, they recall the primordial waters and the tanks of World War II.

All of this witnessing is enthralling but still leaves them wanting. Damiel tells his friend, "It's great to live by the spirit ... but sometimes I'm fed up with my spiritual existence." He wants something to tie him to the earth, to time and space. "To sit at the empty place at a card table and be greeted, even by a nod. ... It would be rather nice, coming home after a long day to feed the cat, like Philip Marlowe. To have a fever, and blackened fingers from the newspaper. At last to guess, instead of always knowing."

Watching a trapeze artist, Damiel falls in love and returns to observe her day after day, strengthening his desire for incarnation. Eventually, he gets his wish and their love is requited.

This love affair dominates most synopses of the film—and drove its loose remake, *City of Angels* (starring Nicolas Cage and Meg Ryan). Wenders' vision, however, is notably free of Wagnerian bombast, Shakespearean tragedy and Austenian romance. And it's largely free of plot. We move from character to character at a gentle, languorous pace, eavesdropping on internal monologues. There is no rush to the love affair, no hurry to become human, no need to go anywhere. We're simply observing humanity.

The film moves with a tension of opposites—not a dualistic, competitive tension, but one that seeks balance and synthesis, and that recognizes that one aspect completes the other. Foremost is the tension between spirit and flesh. Society usually elevates one above the other, tending toward hedonism or Gnosticism, but Wenders suggests life is fullest in their union. The angels love their ethereal existence and notice the spiritual longing of humanity. But they, in turn, need the material world to complete themselves. Approached with a spiritual openness, there's profound joy in the embrace of a soulmate or a simple cup of coffee.

Then there's the tension between childhood and adulthood. The story begins with a narrator writing "The Song of Childhood," a poem that appears in variations throughout the film. "When the child was a child, it walked with its arms swinging. ... Everything was full of life and all life was one." Children are uninhibited and open. They ask simple but profound questions, "Why am I me and why not you?" Adults are too self-conscious and self-occupied. Nonetheless, amidst their jumble of thoughts, they return to these basic questions. Their lives are punctuated by moments of joyful abandonment. After Damiel becomes human, he recites "The Song of Childhood" but adds, "and it still does" to each stanza. Adulthood finds completion in childlike wonder.

Finally, there's the tension between high-brow and low-brow, between the lofty and the mundane. Life's minutiae are juxtaposed with its grand questions, giving equal consideration and substance to both. An operatic score and the majestic cityscapes mix seamlessly with rock clubs featuring Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds. Life moves at the same pace, and both are settings for contemplation.

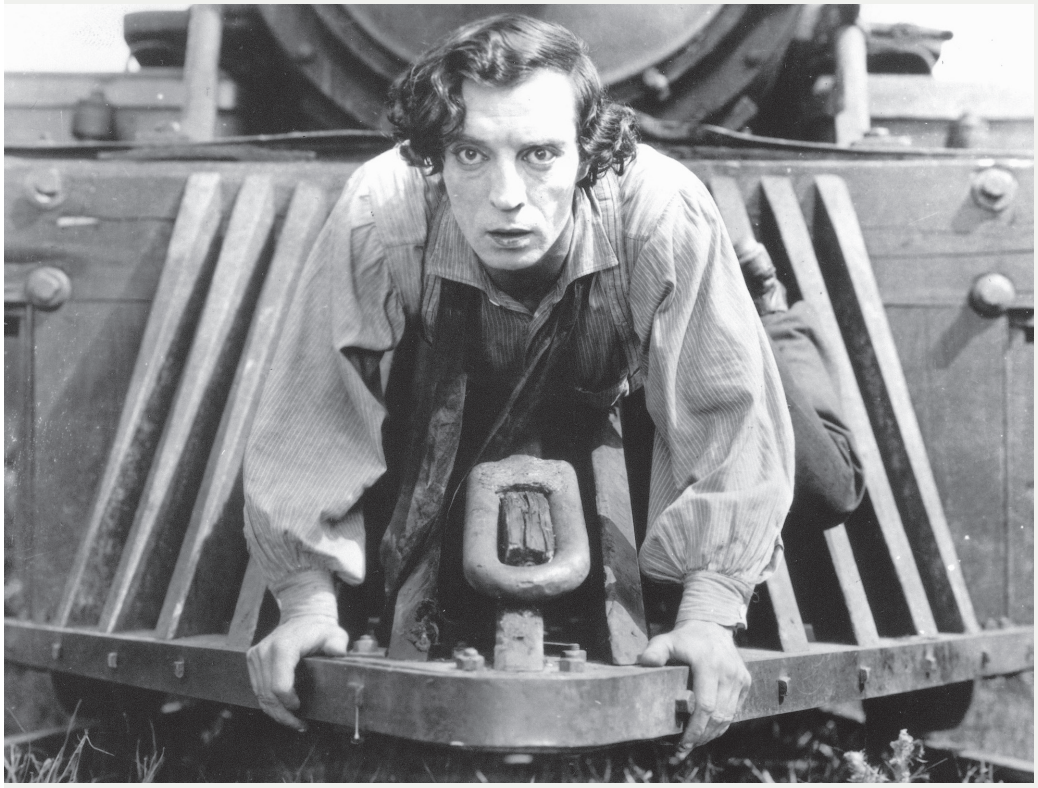
The language itself lives in tension. The angels speak poetically, and the people's thought monologues are ponderous, if not poetic (with both sets of lines written by German playwright Peter Handke). But then Peter Falk, playing himself, improvises his lines and brings a plainspoken levity to the film. He also brings a sense of peacefulness and a steady, reassuring presence. He exemplifies the balance being sought—simple but profound, a spirit fully enjoying the flesh with both childlike exuberance and adult responsibility.

Wings of Desire is a masterful work that's part tone poem, part philosophical treatise and part love story—not a dramatic tale of love writ large, but an exploration of the tiny things that can make life worth loving. This story of angels is really an examination of what it means to be human—in the most profound sense but via the smallest, most trivial details. As it turns out, there's a lot more than the devil in those details.

9.3

TIM REGAN-PORTER IS *PASTE*'S PRESIDENT.

Photo courtesy of Criterion Collection



THE GENERAL

RELEASE DATE: NOV. 10

DIRECTOR/WRITERS: Buster Keaton, Clyde Bruckman
STARRING: Keaton, Marion Mack, Jim Farley, Charles Henry Smith
STUDIO/RUN TIME: Kino International, 78 mins.

A true classic

The irony of Buster Keaton's *The General* being the first silent feature to be released in America on Blu-ray is that—despite its current status in the pantheon of film classics—it initially bombed. And not just with audiences. It was also critically reviled for its inconsistent tone and lack of plot, not to mention Keaton's performance. But the elements that struck its contemporary reviewers as lackluster are the very same that make the film timeless. Eschewing straight comedy, *The General* is equal parts farce, action flick and period piece, setting its absurdly dangerous (and hilarious) stunt work beside a surprisingly accurate representation of the Civil War. Most wrong of all, though, were earlier complaints about Keaton's acting. *The General* is the highlight of his career's tragicomic performances, featuring not just the awe-inspiring stunts that were his bread and butter, but also a level of fluidity only he and Chaplin attained at the top of their games. In hindsight, the one criticism about the film that rings true is Pauline Kael's re-evaluation from decades later: that it failed because it was too perfect. 9.5

SEAN GANDERT

FIGHT CLUB (10TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION)

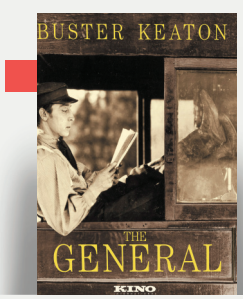
RELEASE DATE: NOV. 17

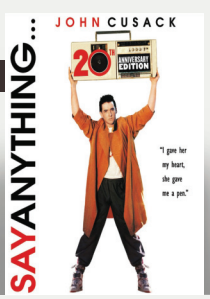
DIRECTOR: David Fincher
WRITERS: Jim Uhls, Chuck Palahniuk
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Jeff Cronenweth
STARRING: Edward Norton, Brad Pitt, Helena Bonham Carter
STUDIO/RUN TIME: Twentieth Century Fox, 139 mins.

A beautiful and unique snowflake

David Fincher's film adaptation of Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club* doesn't tell us anything about consumerism that we don't already know. That's exactly why it's a stunning piece of cinema, and a searing indictment of a society wandering a labyrinth of material comfort and spiritual discontent. Edward Norton's unnamed insomniac milquetoast is a font of dark comedy, playing the suit to Brad Pitt's cocksure and scenery-devouring Tyler Durden. Their titular hyper-violent recreational group represents the ultimate escape from the nepenthe of the "Ikea nesting instinct," promising a return to the Paradise Lost of a mythical ideal masculinity. The end result is a gun in Norton's mouth and the realization that we are destined to either destroy the illusions we create, or be destroyed by them. You are more than your khakis, and this is more than a movie: It's a brutal portrait of our own quiet desperation. 9.2

MICHAEL SABA





SAY ANYTHING (20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION)

RELEASE DATE: NOV. 3

DIRECTOR/WRITER: Cameron Crowe
CINEMATOGRAPHER: László Kovács
STARRING: John Cusack, Ione Skye, John Mahoney
STUDIO/RUN TIME: Twentieth Century Fox, 100 mins.

To know this movie is to love it

Cameron Crowe's *Say Anything* hearkens to that bygone age of teen movies when depictions of first love didn't need a veneer of detached self-awareness. Underachiever and all-around nice guy Lloyd Dobler (John Cusack) genuinely loves the brainy and beautiful Diane Court (Ione Skye). And, though Diane's academic ambitions and overprotective father (John Mahoney) threaten to derail the budding romance, Lloyd doggedly pursues his paramour, pitting his pluck and tenacity against these enormous odds. It comes down to that iconic scene: Lloyd, arms aloft, ghetto-blasting Peter Gabriel's "In Your Eyes" outside of Diane's window. This is an almost fantastical depiction of love, the sort of emotional honesty we've learned to laugh at reflexively. But earnest, true-to-life storytelling and characters make *Say Anything* every bit as tender and affecting as it was two decades ago. 8.2

MICHAEL SABA

The General photo courtesy of Kino International

TO MEAT, OR NOT TO MEAT?

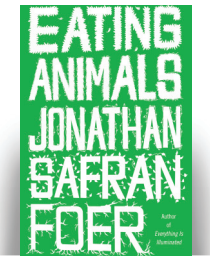
Gifted writer confronts his inner carnivore

BY ANNE LAMOTT

JONATHAN SAFRAN FOER

Eating Animals

[NONFICTION] LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY (R: 7.9)



Jonathan Safran Foer's novels are dense, energetic, concerned with all things moral and Jewish, pleased with themselves, sentimental, and too wordy for a lot of us. They are like wild Russian dances that leave you breathless and wondering why you stayed on the dance floor. Without argument, he is enormously talented and passionate, but his writing and gimmicks can get in the way of the material.

His first nonfiction book, *Eating Animals,* is both everything good and annoying about Foer's fiction. It's bursting with passion, facts, insight, sentimentality, overwrought pleas, and a deep conviction that it's an important book. I underlined many gushy descriptions and self-righteous passages, but an equal number of times I was blown away.

I do not mean by this that I enjoyed the book. This is an exposé on the industrial factory farms that provide America with 99 percent of its meat and chicken, the barbarity of high-speed industrial slaughter, and the disgusting and unhealthy nature of factory-farmed meat—an argument for why no decent person, especially an environmentalist, should eat meat with a good conscience. Foer writes, "We know that if someone offers to show us a film on how our meat is produced, it would be a horror film." He gives truly sickening descriptions of the suffering of factory-farmed animals, plus studies that prove eating meat is a dangerous risk to health. Oh, and he throws in childhood memories and mini-essays on seahorses and kosher foods.

Eating Animals makes a solid case for the absolute devastation meat production levels on the environment, and it's a polemic for vegetarianism, undertaken by Foer when he became a father and faced deciding for his son whether they could eat the animals of their favorite nighttime stories and songs. It's a weave of short chapters about his family, the earth, firsthand accounts of breaking into a factory chicken farm in the middle of the night, interviews with factory and family farmers, animal-rights people, slaughterers, scientists and experts on food-borne illness.

Photo by Gianluca Gentilini

Many readers will find this book a serious buzz kill. I cannot think of a single friend to whom I might recommend it, even though they are all tenderhearted souls, passionate about the environment. They are also food lovers, and mostly great cooks, and they love their animal protein. Even so, the book is riveting, addictive, heartfelt and fair, with surprising humor. Sometimes it sounds like a screed, but so did Rachel Carson's warnings to many people, and Al Gore's. One has to earnestly care about saving the earth, whether or not one is moved by the suffering of, say, turkey chicks.

When I told my priest friend about the chicks, he said, "Who cares?" Then he headed out the door to Ikea for a platter of Swedish meatballs.

The detailed suffering of those chicks is child's play compared to Foer's descriptions of cattle-kill floors or factory chicken barracks. Here's a sentence about USDA chicken inspectors who each examine about 25,000 birds a day: "Every week, millions of chickens leaking yellow pus, stained by green feces, contaminated by harmful bacteria, or marred by lung and heart infections, cancerous tumors, or skin conditions are shipped for sale to consumers."

This is not appetizing prose. And I am not even going to go into the so-called "fecal soup," in which 99 percent of US poultry producers soak their dead chickens, described a few paragraphs later. The point is, you may not even want to finish this review—yet I am urging you to read all 352 pages of the book, for any number of reasons.

My priest friend called me after lunch from Ikea.

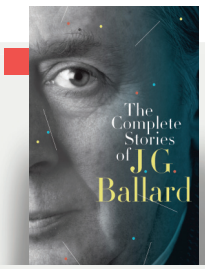
"How was your plate of steaming ebola E-coli baby-calf meatballs?" I asked nicely.

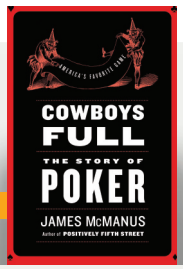
"Yum, yum," he enthused. "Look. This is a totally private decision. Jesus ate Passover lamb every year, and barbecued ribs every chance he got. I care about HIV/AIDS, the polar bears, and poverty. But not about meat."

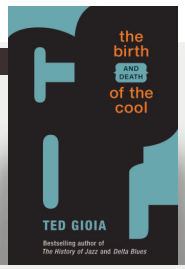
That's his opinion. But Foer made me see how important our questions are. He published this book for the best possible reason: Like all honest writers, he wrote it because he couldn't *not* write it. And I'm glad he did.

7.9

➥ ANNE LAMOTT'S LATEST BOOK IS *GRACE (EVENTUALLY): THOUGHTS ON FAITH.*







J.G. BALLARD

The Complete Short Stories of J.G. Ballard

[FICTION] W.W. NORTON

Domestic shock therapy

Before *The Twilight Zone*, there was J.G. Ballard. The speculative fiction writer—who died earlier this year—wrote the novels that became Steven Spielberg's *Empire of the Sun* and David Cronenberg's 1996 horror flick *Crash*, about the relationship between sex and car crashes. And *The Complete Short Stories of J.G. Ballard* is another wild ride.

In "Studio 5, The Stars," the literary artists of the future all depend on poetry writing machines. In "Chronopolis," house clocks are outlawed until a brainy, renegade teenager stirs a revolution. Even the houses of the future have become potentially perilous—"psychotropic" homes that shape-shift in response to a homeowner's every mood and anxiety flood the real-estate market in "The Thousand Dreams of Stellavista."

Ballard's perverse mind focuses on an unexamined aspect of the domestic world, then twists it, creating fictions that are two parts social commentary and another part camp. *The Complete Short Stories* is a fine primer on a social scientist gone mad. **DARRYL LORENZO WELLINGTON** 8.8

JAMES MCMANUS

Cowboys Full: The Story of Poker

[NONFICTION] FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX

Go all-in on this one

James McManus parlayed an assignment for *Harper's* at the 2000 World Series of Poker into a fifth place finish in the Main Event. His new history of the game traces poker from its roots in China, the Middle East and Europe to today's cultural phenomenon of nonstop televised Texas Hold `Em.

Cowboys Full is loaded with colorful stories and even more colorful characters, not all of whom played by the rules. McManus attributes poker's ascent to American-national-pastime status to Holocaust survivor Henry Orenstein, who invented a table with glass panels through which cameras could reveal each player's hole cards. Prior to the pocket cam, McManus argues, poker on television was "akin to watching bears hibernate and smoke."

McManus does overplay his hand a little with *Cowboys Full*'s "life is poker" theme. But, who knows? Maybe he's just bluffing. **STEVE NAPOLI** 8.3

TED GIOIA

The Birth (and Death) of the Cool

[NONFICTION] SPECK PRESS

Mourning an old friend

Cool is dead. For those of us who missed the funeral, Ted Gioia offers a probing eulogy, reminding us of the cool we once knew—that intangible tangle of image and irony, artifice and fashion. Drawing heavily on his background as a jazz historian, Gioia outlines the birth of cool, devoting a chapter each to three jazz musicians he identifies as its fathers. Weaving from Bugs Bunny to Bond, he sketches a 20th-century timeline. He claims that the corporate co-opting of cool was its death knell, ringing in the current "postcool" era defined by authenticity and earnestness.

Gioia's prose is intelligent and engaging (and wonderfully *un*cool), but some of his points seem off the mark. He says this era is defined by a lessening of irony and vanity; I say, somebody needs a field trip to Williamsburg. **MARTI BUCKLEY KILPATRICK** 7.6

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TRINE TO BREAK YOUR HEART

Beautiful but frustrating

BY MITCH KRPATA

TRINE

DEVELOPER: FROZENBYTE
PUBLISHER: SOUTHPEAK INTERACTIVE
PLATFORMS: PC, PLAYSTATION 3

A depressing trend in sci-fi and fantasy video games is developers' over-reliance on grim, brown-and-grey visuals to present a world in decay. Sometimes it seems as though art directors' reference points began with *Alien* and end with *Aliens*. So whenever a game like *Trine*—downloadable for Windows and the Playstation Network—embraces a vibrant color palette and an appreciation for the wondrous as well as the grotesque, you have to take notice. *Trine*'s high-fantasy milieu is drawn with rich colors and fantastical backdrops: Deep green vegetation grows upon purple rocks, and orange lanterns cast a soft glow that bounces off steampunk-inspired architecture. This game world isn't just colorful—it's gorgeous.

Trine makes a good first impression. A prologue introduces us to three main characters: The knight, a husky, oafish fellow whose armor clanks as he bumbles along; the thief, with her face covered, concealing her visage and her personality; the wizard, offering a humorous

curveball. Far from adhering to the wise, beard-stroking, sexless archetype, he's like a rock star who just so happens to find magic to be the most efficient means of removing a lady's underpants. There's also a wry narrator with a British accent, who hits just the right note of ironic detachment. When describing the three characters' simultaneous discovery of the enchanted Trine, the narrator notes that its magical properties fascinate the wizard, "for once."

Gameplay takes the form of a classic side-scrolling platformer. Each level consists of a combination of environmental hazards and enemies, and no one character can traverse the world on his or her own. (A single player can switch between characters on the fly, or up to three people can play cooperatively.) The levels are designed cleverly enough that any character can use his abilities to solve a problem, but there's often an optimal strategy. This leads to more lateral thinking than is common for games of this type. It also leads to forehead-palm moments—like when you spend five minutes conjuring boxes and attempting to place them *just so*, before realizing that there's an attach point for the thief's grappling hook at the top of the screen.

One of *Trine*'s would-be selling points is its physics-based puzzles, but history has taught us by now that "physics-based" is often a euphemism for "capricious"—and that's the case here. For as much as *Trine* succeeds in the realm of the fantastical, its reliance on allegedly realistic depictions of gravity and inertia is its downfall. Many of the environmental hazards require the player to manipulate an object's momentum or place it ever so delicately in exactly the right spot. Unfortunately, the rigorous physics engine treats every object like a rubber ball. Levitate a crate to move onto one side of a balancing scale, and you will find that the crate starts spinning in midair. Set it down too far from the center of the dangling platform, and it will tip and slide off. If it lands on an incline, it will tumble downhill and off the screen. This isn't just difficult—it's actively working to subvert the player's intent.

Trine's high-fantasy milieu is drawn with rich colors and fantastical backdrops. Deep green vegetation grows upon purple rocks, and orange lanterns cast a soft glow that bounces off steam-punk-inspired architecture. This game world isn't just colorful—it's gorgeous.

Trine is frustrating because in so many ways it seems to be the type of game we need: It's concerned more with indulging the imagination than exploiting our baser instincts, it asks as much from our brains as it does from our reflexes, and it has a sense of humor. If it could just master the basic laws of physics, we'd be set. **6.5**

➥ MITCH KRPATA IS A CONTRIBUTOR TO *PASTE* AND *THE BOSTON PHOENIX*, AND BLOGS ABOUT GAMES AT INSULTSWORDFIGHTING.BLOGSPOT.COM. HE LIVES IN BOSTON.

OSMOS

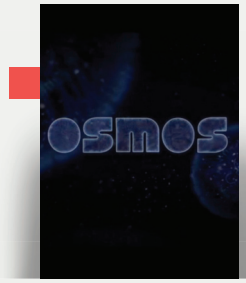
DEVELOPER/ PUBLISHER: HEMISPHERE GAMES
PLATFORM: PC
The motes on the screen go 'round and 'round

If you've ever played *Spore* (Will Wright's playful, ambitious sim blending elements of Darwinian evolution and Intelligent Design), you might remember the first stage, in which you control a tiny single-celled organism. As you whip your little flagella to swim around a prehistoric tidepool, your job is to gobble up any creatures that have the ill fortune of being smaller than yourself. As you manage to eat and grow larger, so does the menu. Now Hemisphere has built an entire casual game around this simple idea, adding compelling new wrinkles to the gameplay. While less visually appealing than *Spore*'s googley-eyed characters, *Osmos*' bubble-like motes drift around a circular field that resembles a deep-space Petri dish. Ambient electronic music pulses while you try to grow larger and more dominant by bumping into and absorbing smaller motes. If you bump into a mote before you've outgrown its circumference, game over. The catch is that, in order to gain speed or change direction, you must expel a stream of baby motes that has two effects: deflating your size while simultaneously feeding competing motes. While the game can grow monotonous if played for long stretches, the trance it locks you in is undeniable. **JASON KILLINGSWORTH** **7.5**

PROFESSOR LAYTON AND THE DIABOLICAL BOX

DEVELOPER: LEVEL-5
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
PLATFORM: NINTENDO DS
A second helping of brain-buffing puzzles

This sequel to *Professor Layton and the Curious Village* is, on its surface, a tale of mystery. And, like many great mysteries, it opens on a train and revolves around death, deception and deduction. But the whodunit element—along with the charming *Triplets of Belleville* animation style—is really just window dressing for the meat of the game: More than 150 brain teasers that will push to the limit your capabilities for logic, spatial reasoning and reading comprehension. (Hint: If a puzzle seems to require a lot of math, scrutinize the wording—it's probably a trick.) You guide the Professor and his apprentice, Luke, through mazes, word problems, spot-the-difference puzzles, and much more, and the constantly changing way you interact with the game saves it from the pitfall of stagnation. Fans of *Curious Village* will appreciate the new mini-games, which involve repairing a broken camera, training a hamster, and concocting exotic teas. It's perfect for bite-sized chunks of play—and for countering your mom's allegation that video games are rotting your brain. **BRIAN HOWE** **7.7**



Professor Layton and the Diabolical Box

ALEC OUNSWORTH

Clap Your Hands Say Yeah frontman Alec Ounsworth gets southern gothic, backed by an all star New Orleans cast. Produced by Steve Berlin of Los Lobos

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UNGLUED

AUGHTIES TREND BINGO

BY JEFF LEVEN

Mark a square if you...

SHOOK IT LIKE A POLAROID PICTURE	TWEETED ABOUT YOUR SHOWDOWN WITH STEPHEN COLBERT	HELD A KRUMP SESSION IN THE PRIUS	INSISTED ON USING A CRYPTIC BAND NAME FOR YOUR SOLO PROJECT	INVITED PEREZ TO YOUR SOUTH-BY SHOWCASE
SUCCUMBED TO GUYLINER	COMPARED "TRAPPED IN THE CLOSET" TO *BEOWULF* ON YOUR BLOG	ADDED FIVE PEOPLE TO THE BAND, JUST FOR GOOD MEASURE	BOUGHT VINYL TO FILL YOUR IPOD	BLAMED IT ON *PITCHFORK*
MOVED TO BROOKLYN	BLEW YOUR COACHELLA REUNION MONEY ON *ROCK BAND* CONTROLLERS	★	DEBUTED YOUR DAZZLING BLACK EYED PEAS/ARCADE FIRE MASH-UP	EXPERIENCED SIMULTANEOUS NOSTALGIA FOR BOTH '90S ALT-ROCK AND '70S FACIAL HAIR
RAN AFOUL OF JACK WHITE'S COLOR-COORDINATED BODYGUARDS	SPENT DAY AT ZOO, CAME HOME WITH BAND NAME	SPRAINED YOUR ANKLE IN A YOUTUBE TREADMILL-DANCE MISHAP	FEARED SIMON, FLIRTED WITH SEACREST, SIGNED WITH CLIVE	MADE BREATHLESS PRONOUNCEMENT ABOUT RADIOHEAD
STRUGGLED TO WRITE GALVANIZING NEO-FOLK SONG ABOUT HANGING CHADS	FORMED A SUPER-SUPER-GROUP CALLED MONSTERS OF QUEENS OF DEAD CROOKED TINTED VELVET AUDIO PORNOGRAPHERS	AUDITIONED FOR DETHKLOK, WOUND UP IN GRIZZLY BEAR	SAW SHADOW, FINISHED *SMILE*	LEAKED YOUR ALBUM TO PREEMPT A LEAK

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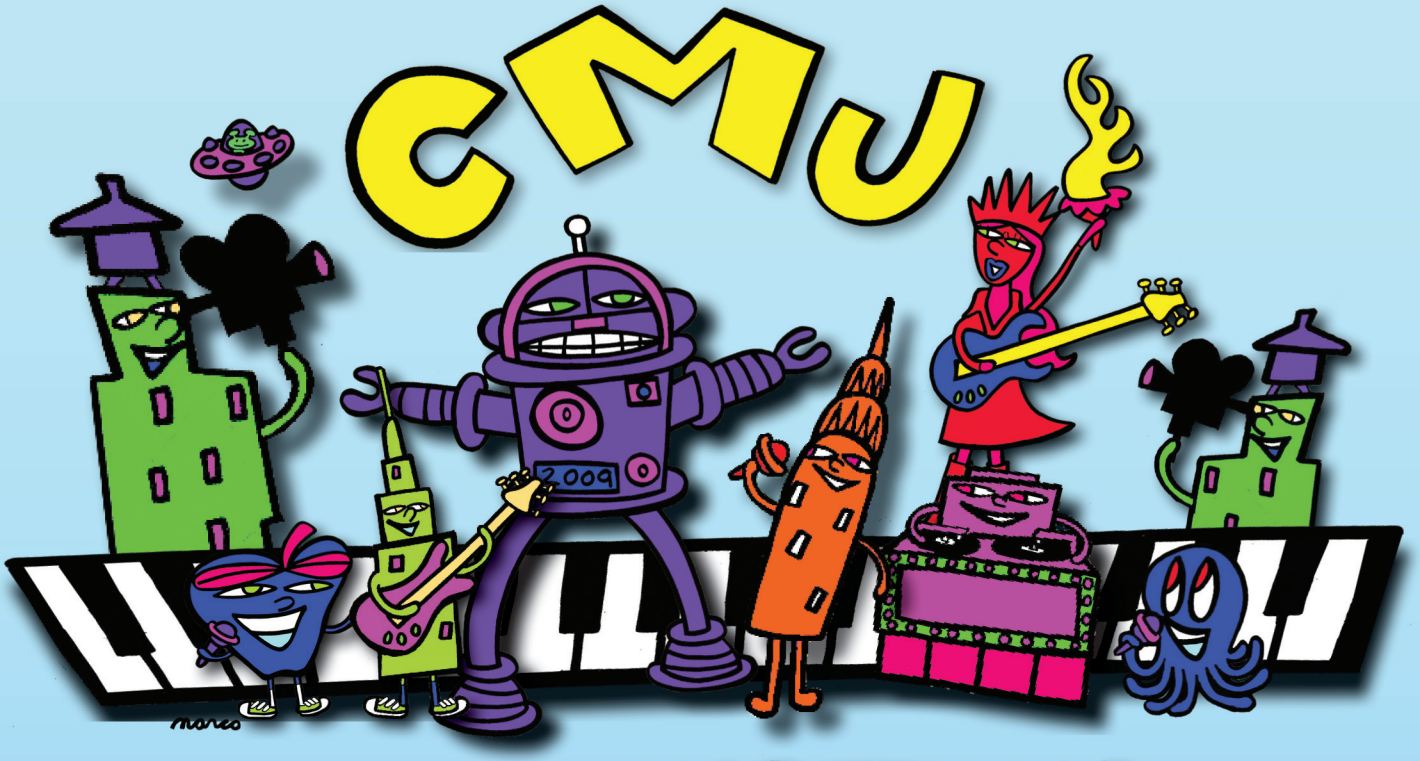

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